

288
PAGES

ALFRED

Winter Double Issue 1989 \$3.50 U.S./\$3.95 Can.

HITCHCOCK's

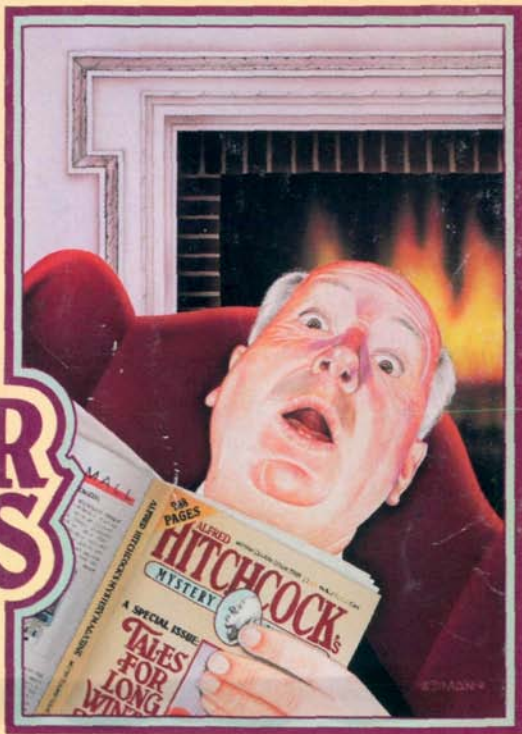
MYSTERY

MAGAZINE



A SPECIAL ISSUE:

TALES FOR LONG WINTER NIGHTS



18 STORIES OF MYSTERY
AND SUSPENSE



36001

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mystery

Take the
Mystery
Out of Credit Cards

With the First Credit Card for Mystery Readers!

The Mystery Card™

FIRSTCITY.

5400 3501 2345 6789

0000

VALID
THRU 00-00

JOHN Q. CARDHOLDER

As a reader of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* you enjoy red herrings, twisted endings, and the surprises that make mystery reading such a pleasure. But no one likes to be surprised in areas of personal finance.

With all the confusion surrounding credit cards these days...interest rates, grace periods, and other details...we're pleased that First City is offering a MasterCard to our readers that will not require you to hire a private investigator, or an attorney, to help you decipher the benefits.

"The Mystery Card"

The unique gothic mansion design expresses your interest in finding clues and solving mysteries.

Your use of "The Mystery Card" will help

solve one of the major medical mysteries of our time...the cure for diabetes.

Every time you buy anything with "The Mystery Card," *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will contribute a percentage of the price to the pioneering medical research of the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation.

Diabetes is a metabolic disorder that adversely affects the body's capacity to produce and use insulin, a hormone necessary for the conversion of food into energy. Approximately one out of every twenty Americans suffers from the disease. And, there is no cure.

Your use of "The Mystery Card" can help the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation discover the clue to the cure of diabetes!

Mystery
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Take the Mystery Out of Credit Cards

and put "The Mystery Card" in your pocket.

"The Mystery Card" is a MasterCard accepted by six million MasterCard merchants worldwide. There's no mystery about its value.

- There's no annual fee for one full year!
- A competitive variable interest rate of prime plus 7.7%.
- 25-day interest-free grace period on purchases when your balance is paid in

full each month.

- Instant Cash at ATMs and bank locations throughout the world.
- \$250,000 Travel Accident Insurance at no extra cost.

AND

- Exclusive discounts on mystery books and related merchandise.

First City MasterCard

Terms and Conditions

Annual Percentage Rate for Purchases	17.7%
Variable Rate Information	Your Annual Percentage Rate may vary. The rate is determined by adding 7.7% to the Prime Rate listed in the "Money Section" of the first <i>Wall Street Journal</i> published after the 15th of the month preceding the first day of the billing cycle. As of 8/4/89 the rate as determined by this formula would be 18.7%. Under this offer, a maximum rate of 17.7% is guaranteed through 12/30/89.
Grace Period for Repayment of Balances for Purchases	You have 25 days after the statement date to repay your balance before a finance charge on purchases will be imposed.
Method of Computing the Balance for Purchases	Average Daily Balance (including new transactions) method.
Annual Fees	Membership fee: \$20.00 per year. Under this offer, the Annual Fee will be waived the first year. At the beginning of the second year, the Annual Fee will be billed to your account automatically.
Minimum Finance Charge	None
Transaction Fee For Purchases	None
Transaction Fee for Cash Advances: \$1.50 Late Payment Fee: \$15.00 Over-the-Credit-Limit Fee: \$15.00	
The disclosures above are accurate as of the date of printing on 8/4/89. These terms are subject to change after this date. Call First City Bank-Sioux Falls, N.A. at 1-800-641-7878 for any changes in the terms disclosed.	



First City Bank - Sioux Falls, N.A.

If you would like an application,

please call (800) 641-7878

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

WHAT'S AFOOT? by Geoffrey Hitchcock	6
DENBOW'S CODE by Stephen Wasyluk	24
AN ATTRACTIVE FAMILY by Robert Arthur	43
FINGER MAN by Jack Ritchie	56
BARBAROSSA AND COMPANY by Kathryn Gottlieb	64
A BURNING ISSUE by Susan Dunlap	85
THE GOLD OF MAYANI by Walter Satterthwait	90
THE HAMBURGER MIND by Evelyn Payne	122
FINGERING A KILLER by Malcolm McClintick	131
THE ALIAS by Lawton O'Connor	139
THE NINE EELS OF MADAME WU by Edward D. Hoch	144
FIRE BURNING BRIGHT by Brendan DuBois	159
A MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP by C. J. Hursch	178
OF THE FIVE WHO CAME by Fletcher Flora	187
PAQUETTE'S BIRTHDAY by Herb Henson	210
CALL TO WITNESS by Nancy Schachterle	228
A DAY AT THE LAKE by Ed Poole	237
TALL TOMMY AND THE MILLIONAIRE by S. S. Rafferty	244

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES	4
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	89
UNSOLVED by Guy Savant	176
SOLUTION TO THE DECEMBER "UNSOLVED"	209
BOOKED & PRINTED by Carol Harper	277
MURDER BY DIRECTION by William Heller	281
THE STORY THAT WON	283



ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 34, Nos. 13 and 14, Winter Double Issue 1989. Published every 28 days with two issues combined at year end, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.00 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.50 in Canada. Annual subscription 14 issues for \$27.97 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$31.50 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1989 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3E1. **ISSN: 0002-5224.**

"An Attractive Family" by Robert Arthur, copyright © 1954 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of Larry Sternig Literary Agency; "A Burning Issue" by Susan Dunlap, copyright © 1981 by Davis Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of the author; "Of the Five Who Came" by Fletcher Flora, copyright © 1958 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.; "Barbarossa and Company" by Kathryn Gottlieb, copyright © 1980 by Davis Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of Elizabeth Gottlieb; "The Nine Eels of Madame Wu" by Edward D. Hoch, copyright © 1980 by Davis Publications, Inc. reprinted by permission of the author; "The Alias" by Lawton O'Connor, copyright © 1958 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of Blas-singame-Spectrum Corp.; "The Hamburger Mind" by Evelyn Payne, copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc.; "Tall Tommy and the Millionaire" by S. S. Rafferty, copyright © 1982 by Davis Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of the author; "Finger Man" by Jack Ritchie, copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of Larry Sternig Literary Agency; "Call to Witness" by Nancy Schachterle, copyright © 1972 by H.S.D. Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of the author.

Cover by Jon Weiman
Interior illustrations by Carol Inouye

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Welcome to our New Special Winter Double Issue, which takes the place of the Mid-December issue of previous years. It's a collection of stories numerous enough, we hope, to take you through a number of those "long winter nights" mentioned on the cover, a combination of new and vintage tales.

We're pleased, by the way, to welcome four authors to our pages for the first time. Geoffrey Hitchcock, whose delightful tale, "What's Afoot?," opens the issue, hails from New Zealand. Now retired and able to devote more time to writing, he says, "I've worked at being an electrical engineer, a fruit

farmer, and a scientist. And a sort of soldier." Herb Henson, author of "Paquette's Birthday," is also familiar with the engineering game, and is also a soldier; he's a technical writer for an electronics engineering firm and is a retired Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer, was a Green Beret, and served in the Marine Corps. "I have," he says, "a special affection for the Far East and the Pacific islands where I have spent a significant part of my life." It shows, we think, in his charming treatment of Paquette's friends and neighbors.

Both Mr. Henson's and Ed Poole's stories are their first

(continued on page 22)

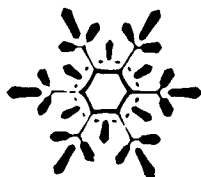
Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Holly Garrison**, Managing Editor; **Judy Downer**, Editorial Assistant; **Terri Czezko**, Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Associate Art Director; **Nancy Siwinski**, Junior Designer; **Carole Dixon**, Production Director; **Cynthia Manson**, Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts and Permissions; **Elizabeth Beatty**, Subscription Manager; **Brian McKeon**, Circulation Planning Director; **Christian Dorbandt**, Newsstand Marketing and Promotion Manager; **Dennis Jones**, Newsstand Operations Manager; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **A. Bruce Chatterton**, Advertising Director; **Lisa Feerick**, Advertising Services Manager.

(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-795-3114.)

Joel Davis, President; **Joe DeFalco**, Vice President, Finance; **Carl Barte**, Vice President, Manufacturing.



Give a gift of **ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**



Why give knick-knacks for Christmas when for a stocking stuffer of a price, you can give your friends spine-tingling mystery, suspense and intrigue. Delivered thirteen times throughout the coming year in the pages of **Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine**.

Once-a year holiday rates are now in effect! The first subscription to **Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine** costs only **\$17.97**. Each additional subscription is even less—just **\$14.97**

And you can complete your **Alfred Hitchcock** gift giving in a matter of minutes. Just fill out the form below or if you prefer, call us with your order **toll free: 1-800-333-3311**

Gift subscriptions received by December 1st will start at the holiday season. Orders that arrive subsequently will begin with the current issue. Greeting cards will be sent to announce your gift.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine is also available at these holiday rates. The first subscription costs only **\$17.97**, each additional subscription is only **\$14.97**.

Mail To:
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine
P.O. Box 7055
Red Oak, Iowa 51591

☐ Payment Enclosed
check desired, title(s)

Alfred Hitchcock ☐ Ellery Queen ☐

☐ Bill me after January 1

Gift For:

Bill To:

Name _____

Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Sign Gift Card _____ **Y9SC-5**

What's Afoot?

by Geoffrey Hitchcock

Percy paused in his work of digging up his old strawberry patch and leaned on his spade. An idea for a poem was coming into his mind. "The glory that was Greece gives way to Rome; the glory of the strawberries gives way to lowly spuds"—but before he could develop the theme, his wife came into the garden and at the same time he noticed something.

"Come over here," he said. "I've just noticed that standing here you can see straight down Tauhou Street."

"So you can!"

"There must be fifty houses in that street, and I don't know a single person living in any of them. That's terrible."

But Pauli didn't see anything terrible about it; as far as she could see it was perfectly normal. Why, they hardly knew their next door neighbors in Tihoi Street, so how could they be expected to know people in Tauhou Street, even if they did walk along it nearly every day.

"But don't you see," Percy persisted, "if we can't be interested in our neighbors—find

out what they think, what makes them tick—how can we expect nations to understand nations? What hope of peace?"

"Would you like to have smoko now, dear?" said Pauli.

Percy sighed and followed her into the house. A new poem was forming in his mind and he reached for his pencil and paper and wrote it down.

*"Who lives in Number One?
Is it Mr. Duncan Dunn?
Across the road in Number
Two—
Hindu? Muslim? Chris-
tian? Jew?
That big house at Number
Three
Has room for quite a
family.
But perhaps there's only
Widow Gee
Who'll ask me in and give
me tea.
Who knows, who cares,
Indeed who cares one jot
Who lives in Number Three?"*

*"Who lives in Number
Eight?
Old Mr. Tate,
Leaning, lonely, on his gate,*



PERCY WORKED ON THE PROBLEM OF THE SINISTER OCCUPANT OF
NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Hoping to pass the time of
day*

*With all of those who pass
his way?*

And does Miss Vine

In Number Nine

*Hang out nappies on the
line*

*And softly sigh and sadly
pine?*

Who knows—who cares?

"Is Mrs. Dean,

Who's in Fifteen,

*Always tidy, neat, and
clean?*

While Mrs. Surtee

In Number Thirty

*Is she (now I'll fool you)
—flirty?*

Do they have fun

In Twenty-one

And live on stew

In Forty-two?

"Who knows—who cares?

Who dares

To knock on Number

Twenty-four?

Ah me,

Could I but see

*What dangers lurk behind
the door*

Of fearsome Number

Twenty-four?"

Pauli came in with the tea tray.

"Listen to the poem I'm writing," said Percy, and proceeded to read it to her while she

poured out. "What do you think?"

"Why do you always rhyme so much?" she complained.

"I can't help it—not when I'm in a good mood."

"You must always be in a good mood."

"I am, mostly—is that bad?"

"I suppose not, but you'll never get a poem in the *Listener*."

"Who knows? Who cares? Who dares to send the *Listener* a rhyme? A poem that makes sense first time? These scones are good."

And with that he addressed himself to the business at hand while his mind went off on its own track and his automatic defense system took over.

Pauli's fault was that she never stopped talking and Percy had remained happy and sane simply by not listening while his own thoughts kept him entertained. His automatic mechanism dropped in an occasional "Yes, dear," or "No, dear," or "Fancy that" about every thirty seconds.

So Pauli chatted away and Percy worked on the problem of the sinister occupant of Number Twenty-four. Perhaps there was a Russian spy sending *Listener* poems to Moscow because he was convinced they were in code.

"Mrs. Jones's cousin's daughter, you know, the one who mar-

ried the commercial traveler, had twins last week—that's four girls she's got now. More tea?"

"Yes, dear." Or perhaps there was a white slaver who planned to kidnap Mrs. Jones's four daughters and send them to a house of delight in Buenos Aires.

"The Stevensons' holiday bach was broken into and two thousand dollars' worth of jewelry was stolen. Would you believe anybody could leave so much jewelry in a bach? And a television."

"No, dear." It's a hideout for a gang of thieves. Our hero watches from the shadows while masked men carry in stolen jewels and television sets.

"Mrs. Brown says her uncle has invented an electronic dog that growls and barks if burglars break in, but you can pat it if you're a friend."

"Fancy that." There's a mad professor living there. He is making robots in the shape of hideous beasts that roam the streets at night and frighten people to death.

"The Atkinsons are coming to tea this afternoon, but they won't be here until three thirty because they're going to the hospital first to look in on her cousin who's got..."

"Yes, dear." The man in Twenty-four strangled his wife because she never stopped talking.

"You haven't been listening to a word I've been saying." She gave him an affectionate pat on the knee. "Have you?"

Percy blinked and surfaced. The situation wasn't all that uncommon. "Sorry, dear, I was preoccupied with ideas for a story about Number Twenty-four."

"If Number Twenty-four is worrying you so much, why don't you simply go round there and pay the occupants a visit?"

"What a good idea. In fact, why don't I visit all the houses? I'll start this very afternoon!"

"Bully for you," said Pauli, knowing quite well that her dearly beloved was much too timid ever to knock on a stranger's door.

"I'll go straight after my after-lunch nap. I won't take Bonzo—he might not be welcome."

"And mind you wrap up warm."

"I'll take my scarf," said Percy, looking out on the brilliant autumn sunshine.

"And don't be too long. The Atkinsons will be here about half past three."

"Oh, are they coming to tea today? I didn't know."

"At half past three." Pauli knew it was no use getting into strife about it.

Ten past two found Percy starting his walk along Tauhou Street. It was disappointing from

the start. The first house was Number Forty-six and there was a name on the letterbox—Johnson, not Quix. Percy sighed and moved along, observing the houses really carefully for perhaps the first time.

Most of the houses didn't have the occupants' names displayed, and when they did, they didn't rhyme with the numbers at all. Mrs. Dean, who had such a wide choice, had elected to live in Thirty-seven! Maddening! Percy gradually came out of his poetic fantasy. He looked at Number Twenty-four with some trepidation, but there wasn't really anything fearsome about its front door at all. It was a stout paneled door, set off center in a green weatherboard house with large, welcoming windows and tiled roof. Two steps led to a porch that sheltered the door. A pleasant if somewhat ordinary house.

The section on which it was built sloped away rather steeply, and Percy guessed that the house would be high off the ground at the back with probably the garage underneath it. Indeed, a driveway led down past the side of the house. The front garden was neat but not excessively so, unlike Number Fifteen where Percy felt he daren't call for fear he'd leave a footprint in the garden.

On then to the end of the

road, rapidly losing interest until Number One, which had a small nameplate: B. and M. Gunn. By Jove, thought Percy, Ben Gunn in Number One—if I'd brought some cheese I'd have been sure of a welcome! But the carport was empty and the letterbox was stuffed with circulars.

The whole street's dead, thought Percy. No wonder we don't know anybody here. He turned to walk back, thinking that the idea was silly and he'd just have to brave Pauli's taunts. He hadn't seen a soul in the whole street, but now in Number Twenty-three there was a woman in a sundress and a floppy hat (dress up warm, thought Percy, whose muffler was in his pocket) snipping at her roses.

"Lovely day for gardening," he volunteered.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Bannister, going for a walk? Where's your dog?"

"Do you know old Bonzo, then?"

"Of course. He's always so good about waiting for you outside the shop."

That pressed a key. "Of course—it's Mrs. Lee from the dairy. I didn't recognize you in your sun hat and out of your natural element, so to speak. So I do know somebody in Tauhou Street after all!" He proceeded

to tell her the whole tale, and even recited his verse.

She listened with great interest. "Of course being in the dairy I know most of the folk around here, but I think it's a perfectly splendid idea. Where will you begin? At Number One? Oh no—the Gunns are in Australia for the month and the Pughs are both at work."

"Are they really called Pugh in Number Two?"

"Not really—they're Morrisons—I was just joining in the fun. I don't think there are any number-rhyming names in the street apart from the Gunns."

"And yourself," said Percy, warming to her.

"Of course, Mrs. Lee in Twenty-three—she may invite you in to tea! I'd never thought of it before. And right opposite are Mr. and Mrs. Shaw in Twenty-four! Well I never!" She thought for a moment. "But that's all I can think of. Why don't you start there? They're a nice elderly couple about your age, though she's away, I think. But he'll be there, I saw his station wagon drive in just a few minutes ago."

"But that's where the terrors lurk," objected Percy. "What about Twenty-two?"

Mrs. Lee laughed. "I doubt very much you'll find any terrors there, they are really nice people. But as to Twenty-two

I'd better warn you that there's a widow living there, and if you make her acquaintance, she'll be forever pestering you. And she's a troublemaker."

"A troublemaker?"

"A gossip. Just now she's spreading a rumor that Mr. Shaw has murdered his wife."

"Did he, do you think?"

"Of course not, but she's sure of it because Mrs. Shaw went away without telling her. My guess is that Margaret went away to get Mrs. Drew off her back for a while."

"Then why don't I call in and find out?"

"Why not indeed," agreed Mrs. Lee. "What a splendid opportunity to put Mrs. Drew in her place."

"Because," said Percy honestly, "I'm not brave enough."

But Mrs. Lee scoffed at the suggestion, and our hero found himself with a big iron knocker in his hand. Almost immediately the sinister door was opened by a big greyhaired man whose usually kind lines were creased into a puzzled frown.

"You don't look like a policeman," he said. That threw Percy, and all he could think of to say was, "Oh! Don't I?"

"No. But I suppose if Dietrich and Wojo are anything to go by, it doesn't mean a thing. Come in anyway."

He ushered Percy into a large,

comfortably furnished room, the main feature of which was several mounted sets of antlers overshadowed by a magnificent stag's head.

"Take a pew," said the man, indicating a comfortable arm-chair. Percy sat and gazed round the room.

"I say," he said, "what a magnificent head . . . you didn't . . . did you?"

"Yes, I did. I'm a deer stalker. Do you hunt?"

"Not me—you need to be a big strong fellow for that. I fish sometimes. Mostly I work in the garden and round the house, but for a hobby I write a bit—not much—just the odd short story and a bit of verse."

"A poet! You seem less and less like a policeman."

"I'm not. I'm Percy Bannister and I live at the end of the road in Tihoi Street."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so?"

"I was going to, but you seemed so obsessed with the police—are you expecting them?"

"Not exactly." The big man dismissed the matter as of no importance. "So what can I do for you, Percy?"

Percy explained. He considered reciting his verse, of which he was rather proud and at which Mrs. Lee had clapped her hands with pleasure, but in

time he remembered the line about the door of Twenty-four. "What do you think of the idea?" he concluded.

His host was delighted. "I think that's great. You're quite right—we should be more caring of each other. Glad to know you, Percy. Uncommon name. I'm Dick Shaw, though my wife called me Richard—thought it was more classy."

"Don't you have a wife any more?" asked Percy, pleased with himself for being able to broach the subject so soon.

Dick considered the question before answering. Then he shrugged. "I suppose I have."

"Don't you know?"

"Well, I suppose the answer is yes I have, but we had a flaming row a while back and she left home. Haven't seen her since."

"I am sorry."

"Well," Dick considered, "so am I in a way. On the other hand it's pretty marvelous. Terrible nag she's become lately. Do this—do that—why don't you do the other. All day long, it was beginning to drive me mad. Why couldn't I have a bit of peace now that I'm retired and do what I wanted? I wasn't causing any trouble."

"No. I see what you mean, I can understand how you felt."

"Can you, Percy? Does your wife nag you too?"

"Not much really, but she never stops talking. I don't listen, of course, but there are times when I could cheerfully bash her one."

"I could strangle mine sometimes."

"You didn't. Did you?"

"Don't be ridiculous. What... oh, the police thing. There's a stupid woman next door—she was on good nagging terms with Mag and just because Mag went off without telling her—and why should she, for Pete's sake—she's spreading a rumor that I've done the old girl in."

"Ah, so that accounts for the police business." Percy began to feel a wave of sympathy for Dick.

"I've been half expecting her to go to them and report a murder. Not a shred to go on, of course, but I wouldn't put it past the silly old cow. They'd only laugh at her."

"They'd curse her and all you'd do is tell them where your wife is and Mrs. Drew would look a right Charleen."

"Mrs. Drew?"

"From Twenty-two."

"Of course, old poet—sorry, I'm a bit slow on the uptake. Not quite as easy as that, though. I haven't the foggiest where she's gone."

"You mean you don't know where she is?"

"No, and I don't care. She's welcome back any time, but I'm not going chasing after her. She walked out, not me."

"But if she's been gone more than a week, shouldn't you report her missing?"

"If I did that, old boy, they'd be sure to find her. After all, she must have gone somewhere—to some friend or cousin that I don't know about, or to a hotel. Back to England, even."

"Could she really walk out just like that?"

"It wasn't quite so casual. I say, old visitor, I'm being very inhospitable burdening you with my troubles without offering you something. What'll it be? Something alcoholic, or are you a tea and coffee man?"

"Thank you, we generally do have a cup of coffee at this time of the day, but that would be imposing."

"Not at all. Not at all. If you hadn't called, I'd be putting the kettle on anyway."

He led Percy through to a pleasant room with kitchen at one end and dining table at the other and seated him on a high stool at a counter that divided the room while he busied himself with the kettle. From his seat, Percy looked through a wide picture window to an unobstructed view of lake and mountains.

"I like this room best," said Dick.

"It's easy to see why." Percy was enthusiastic. "What a magnificent open view. Mine's restricted by trees."

"Trees are good, too, but I love my mountains and the forest." He put two steaming mugs of coffee and slices of fruit cake on the counter, which was wide enough for him to sit opposite Percy. For a while they were quiet, savoring the view and the coffee.

"You make an excellent cup of coffee and this cake's good. You didn't make it, did you?"

Dick laughed. "No, Mrs. Adams or Mrs. Irvine made the cake. I'm strictly a bush cook, and that doesn't run to fruit cake. Mag was a dab hand at cake, I'll say that for her."

"So you had a barney one evening, and when you woke up next morning she'd gone?" Percy was anxious not to let the subject drop.

"No, no, it wasn't like that. I got up very early and went into the Kaimanawas. I stayed there two days."

"I see," said Percy. It did make sense now. She was fed up with his always going off and leaving her, so she had plenty of time to pack a bag and take off. "And when you came back she was gone. It must have been a shock."

"Percy, my friend, it was, and at the same time, it was wonderful. I'd had two glorious days in the bush—not stalking, just communing with nature as they say. Tane had soothed my shattered nerves. I had walked until I was physically exhausted and was filled with that glow of contentment that only such days can produce. Heaven would be a hot tub and a long, cool beer, but I braced myself for an ear-bashing."

"Which didn't come."

"No," said Dick, "talk about all this and a Seven too—only I don't smoke, do you?"

"No, gave it up years ago, but I know how you felt. I hate coming home after a day's fishing and being fussed over and put in a hot bath. But it must have been a shock for all that."

"Yes and no. She had always threatened to leave home if I went into the bush alone. But of course she never had—before."

"No. I can understand her being anxious if you do that. Isn't it one of the first rules . . ."

"Aw, come off it, old comrade, don't you start nagging now. I've been tramping in the bush since I was a kid."

"But perhaps she thought you were getting past it."

"Hey, steady on, how old do you think I am?"

"Sixty-five?"

"Well, I'm not, I'm only seventy-two!"

"Oh well, that's different." They had a good laugh over that.

"And I'm still very strong," Dick said.

"I can see that." Everything was quite clear to Percy now. Silly old codger didn't know when it was time to slow down. No mystery now about his wife walking out. It was time to change the subject.

"This coffee is good," he said.

"Bush style," said Dick, topping up their mugs. Percy sniffed the coffee, appreciated the aroma, and then some other not so pleasant odor, crept into his nostrils. He lifted his head away from his mug and sniffed the air. Drains, perhaps?

"I say, Dick, you sure you didn't do for your missus?"

Dick sniffed the air and frowned. He stood up and took a large meat cleaver off the wall, then he came round the counter and, trying hard to conceal his mirth, he suddenly grabbed the startled Percy from his stool and steered him towards the outside door before he could think what was happening.

"You have discovered my secret, so now you are implicated and must help me dispose of the corpse."

And before the now thor-

oughly disconcerted Percy could gather his wits, he found himself being hustled down a flight of wooden steps that led down the side of the house and round the corner into the back yard where, to his horror, he saw Mag in her nightgown hanging from a beam that protruded from the wall. He let out a strangled cry and felt his knees buckle.

When he recovered, he found he'd been propped up comfortably against the wall. Summoning all his courage he looked at the "body." He at once noticed two things about it: it had no head and a small black hoof was protruding below the hem of the nightie. He felt very foolish. What would his new friend think of him? It was obvious now that it was all a big joke and Dick would have been expecting a roar of laughter—not a swooning nincompoop. After all, what murderer would leave his victim hanging up for all to see?

He had just managed to struggle to his feet when Dick came down the stairs with a glass of whisky.

"Sorry about that," he said. "Here, drink this, it'll put the color back in your cheeks." And while Percy was gagging on the strong drink, he burst into uncontrollable mirth.

"If only you could have seen

yourself." Tears were running down his cheeks. "I wish it had been Mrs. Drew. She might have died of heart failure!"

"I might have died of heart failure," protested Percy.

"Never, old man, your heart is too big, but I do apologize. I get carried away with my leg-pulling. Perhaps that's why I have so few friends. It's the Irish in me."

He went on to explain that he had hung up a side of venison to "ripen" and had covered it with one of Mag's passion-killers to keep the flies off.

"But why the drama with the meat cleaver?"

"No drama. I was going to cut you a joint. You deserve something nice after listening to all my nonsense."

"Thanks very much," said Percy, imagining how Pauli would react to the undoubtedly "ripe" meat, "but I mustn't deprive you."

"No possibility," said Dick, who proceeded to unlock and open a heavy door. "Look—plenty more where that came from."

Percy saw that the door opened into a sizeable cold store. There was a rail across the room from which deer carcasses were hanging, and on the floor at the back a whole heap more. He was about to inquire why they were on the floor when there were so many spare hooks

when his eye caught something that gave him such a jolt that Dick couldn't help noticing it.

"What is it now?"

Percy was in a state of shock. "There's a foot sticking out . . . it's . . . got . . . five toes."

Dick looked into the room. "How the hell did that happen." He locked the door carefully.

Percy just stood there waiting for his legs to regain their function. "I'll go home now. I think I've overstayed my welcome."

"No, don't do that. I don't want you to go away thinking badly of me."

"I won't do that," moaned Percy. "I don't doubt you were driven to it. I'm not feeling very well."

But the big man had other ideas. "Come upstairs and I'll give you a drink . . . and we'll decide where we go from here."

Percy looked around for an escape route, but there didn't seem to be one. "I don't really have much option, do I?"

"Not really," said Dick, and guided the unwilling little man up the stairs. Seated at the counter again, Dick poured two enormous drinks in spite of Percy's protests that he wasn't used to whisky.

"You're in a state of shock," he said, "so knock that back. Cheers."

"Cheers," said Percy, obeying. "Wow—that was strong."

"Put you right—there," filling the glasses again. "You can drink this one more slowly while I tell you exactly what happened."

"Hic! Pardon." The two large whiskies were taking effect already. Percy began to feel a warm glow and a feeling of confidence. Maybe his position wasn't as hopeless as it had seemed while he was being hustled up the stairs. He took a generous sip of his third whisky. He was beginning to get a taste for it. "Right you are then, old soldier, fire away and no lies this time."

"Percy, my old bard, I haven't told you a lie yet. I may have noted some unlikely possibilities and left out a few details. I'll fill them in now."

Percy took another sip. He was beginning to feel well in control of the situation. "Carry on, corporal," he said.

Dick took a deep swig himself. "I'd arranged to go on a short hunting trip with Len Gardner, but at the last minute he phoned to say he couldn't make it—Mag took the message. I said never mind, I'd go on my own, and that started it. All the afternoon—what if this, what if that, what if, what if, what if! Drove me barmy."

"Must say I see her point of view."

"Now, Percy, I thought we'd agreed . . ."

"Not nagging," said Percy, "see your point of view too, but not safe to go in the bush alone."

"Dammit, man, the bush is no more dangerous to me than walking down the street is to you."

"Funny things happen to me walking down the street," said Percy pointedly. Dick decided to let that one ride.

"Anyway I kept out of her way all evening while I got my gear ready. She went to bed early. The trouble was that she'd got old and frail and couldn't understand that I was still strong as an ox. I sleep in the spare room when I'm going off early so's not to disturb her."

"Thoughtful of you." Percy drained his glass.

"I'm not all bad. I went to kiss her goodnight, and damn me if she didn't start all over again. What would happen to her if . . . I let her rant on for ten minutes; then, when I was beginning to lose my temper, I grabbed her by the shoulders and gave her a good shake. 'That's enough,' I shouted, 'now shut up and go to sleep.' I dropped her on the pillow and stalked out. When I got home two days later, she was still there."

Percy was shocked. He pushed his glass towards Dick, who filled it automatically.

"You told me she'd gone."

"She had gone but she was

still there, if you get my drift."

"You sure she was still there—not there again?"

"She didn't seem to have moved. Can't be sure, though. A person in bed one night looks much the same as any other night. I think I must have dislocated her neck—her head was floppy."

"The doctor could have told you."

"I didn't send for the doctor. He'd only have confirmed that I'd killed her."

"The pleesh then—it was only an accident."

"I thought about it, but what would they do? Lock me up. Drag me through the courts. Accuse me of womanslaughter, then lock me up again. I don't have time for all that."

"Right, no time for all that. So what did you do?"

"I didn't do anything. I thought, She's gone now, poor dear, and perhaps not much before her time. And nothing will bring her back. And I don't expect to last much longer. A couple of years, perhaps, then one of the things she worried about will happen. So why not leave it at that?"

"You're quite right—couldn't agree more." The mists that had clouded Percy's thinking were beginning to clear. "But laws, customs, and you had a corpse on your hands."

"Yes," replied Dick, "and a

busybody neighbor, so I carried poor Mag down to the cold room and hid her behind the carcasses while I thought things through."

"And have you?"

"Well, no. Up to now it's worked very well as it is. 'Nother drink?"

"Cheers," said Percy, clinking his glass with Dick's. "Whatcha mean—up to now?"

"You don't think anything's changed?"

"Why should it? Just because you showed me a foot? Not my bishness is it what a man dush with hish wife? Own affair."

"You mean you don't intend to phone the police as soon as you get home?" Dick eyed him narrowly.

"Not lesh you want me to."

"Why the devil should I want you to?"

"Why'd you show me that damn foot?"

"I didn't mean to. I don't know how it slipped out. I was trying to allay suspicion, wasn't I? Give the busybodies something to think about."

Percy thought about it for a while and emptied his glass. "I wonder," he said.

Dick's temper was beginning to fray. "What do you mean you wonder," he shouted. "What the hell do you think I was doing? Here, have another drink."

"Yesh," said Percy, "helps me to think clearly. Not

sh . . . muddled sh . . . usual."

"Good. Think clearly, then."

"I think . . . I think you were calling for help."

Dick exploded. "Help? Me? From a pipsqueak like you that I've never met until today?"

"Not likely, is it?" acknowledged Percy.

"No."

"No—but the point is . . ." If Percy was sure of one thing now, it was that he wanted to go home. "The point is, no matter what you shay, I'm going to be drawn into this. I know you've got a heavy load, even for your broad shoulders, and I'm shorry. Like to help . . . not going to be drawn in." He started to rise unsteadily to his feet, but the big man reached over and sat him down again.

"You are drawn in, old philosopher, up to your neck."

"Yesh, but I'm drawing out now." He tried to get up again.

"No, sit down till we sort this out," said Dick, pressing him down again.

"No need to push me like that. I'm your friend, aren't I? Tell you now . . . feel shorry for you . . . damn shorry . . . know you didn't mean to do it. Know you were still fond of her, elsh why would you kisher goo'night?"

"It wasn't always bad. Mostly it'd been good."

"So, you had acshident . . . should've gone to

pleesh . . . cleared the matter up . . . butcha didn't . . . you thought you'd found freedom that'd last. You began to wish the silly ol' biddy next door would go to pleesh . . . but she didn't." Percy's mind was very clear now. He just wished the room wouldn't float up and down.

"But she didn't," prompted Dick.

"So when I came 'long, you took . . . opportunity to get me involved."

Dick was amazed. "You worked all that out?"

"By myself," said Percy proudly.

Dick shook his head—slowly, because the drink was beginning to get to him, too.

"You must be off your rocker. I was just trying to allay suspicion. Now I've got you on my hands."

"I'll get off, then, no trouble. Tell you what I'll do, I think you want help so I'll help you . . . tell you what I'll do . . . is the whisky finished?"

"Never!" Dick filled the glasses, then raised his in a toast. "To Mag."

"Yesh, the nag. Tell you what I'm going to do, I'm going to do nothing, that okay, Dick?"

"That's splendid, Percy, couldn't be better."

Percy struggled to his feet and once more Dick pushed him down again.

"You can't go yet, old soldier, I need a guarantee."

"Don't push me down all the time. What guarantee?"

"That you won't tell that chatterbox wife of yours."

"Tell Pauli? Don't ever tell her anything, old com-pat-riot, be all over the neighborhood if you do."

"That's right, Persh. Thash why need guarantee."

Percy thought hard for a moment. "Crosh my heart and hope to die?"

Dick considered this, then shook his head sadly. "Not good enough."

"How about Shcoutsh honor?" suggested Percy hopefully.

"Sorry, old sergeant . . . been a scout m'self . . . have to lock you in the cold room."

"Can't do that, cap'n, haven't got my jersey on. Only a muffer."

"Only soundproof room in the house," said Dick.

"I (hic) presheate your point, old turnkey, but there'sh a problem. Pauli will come looking for me. That'sh it!" He snapped his fingers in delight. "Lock Pauli in cold room."

"Stop her talking," said Dick doubtfully.

"Stop me talking, too, colonel . . . get in trouble if I do."

"Percy, you old Einstein, you're a genius. How do we get her in?"

"Shimple . . . ring her

up . . . tell her put on lotsh warm cloze . . . bring basket . . . gonna giver her some fenison. Then shut door."

"Full marks, professor. What's her number?"

"Pauli's number? Cucumber." He giggled. He thought hard. "Don't know her number . . . never ring her up, see . . . I'm already there . . . don't have to phone her."

But when they tried to look up the number in the directory, the small print danced about so it was impossible.

"I'll go and get her," said Percy. "Sh not far."

"Don't be long," said Dick. "Going out early tomorrow."

"You gonna kill another old deer?"

"Now, now, none of that. Jush going deep bush for a few days. Clear up some problems. You go get Pauli."

"Three minutes," said Percy, but in his haste to stagger out he opened the wrong door.

"Tha's a cupboard," said Dick.

"Full of Mags," said Percy.

"Relics of the days she had her boutique. Dress shop to you."

"I know . . . this one's got a foot missing."

Somehow he managed to get home and fall up the front steps without hurting himself. Pauli came running out and helped him in.

"Where have you been? I don't

know what the Atkinsons must have thought. Thank goodness they didn't see you like this—you've been drinking."

"Jush one or two . . . lishen, Pauli . . . s'important . . . losh and losh cloze . . . big basket . . . get locked in cold shtore."

"What on earth are you on about?"

"Cloze," said Percy, "locked in Dick's cold store . . . oh, I feel bad."

Everything was going black and the house was on a roller-coaster . . .

Percy woke in the morning and reached across the bed for Pauli. She wasn't there. A sudden vision of her locked in Dick's cold store-room sent him racing to the phone. He had already dialed the first two digits when he heard Pauli making tea in the kitchen. "Pauli! Thank God you're here."

"Where did you think I'd be?"

"In the freezer."

"Now you just pop back into bed and I'll bring you a nice cup of tea and some aspirin and when you're feeling better you can tell me all about it."

"Ow, my poor head," he said and obeyed her instructions. He thought a lot about how much he should tell her, and eventually, over breakfast, he told her everything—well, as much as he could remember.

Pauli thought it all very funny. She didn't believe Percy had really seen a foot in the cold room.

"What an afternoon you had, my poor darling! What are you going to do now?"

"Nothing," said Percy, whose aching head took all the fun out of the episode.

"You're probably right," said Pauli. "You drank so much whisky that you couldn't be sure what was going on."

"No, it's all very confused. I just wish I'd never noticed that smell. Do you know, I can still smell it."

Pauli sniffed the air. "So can I, it's coming from outside."

She went to the front door and came back with a carton that had an unmistakeable effluvium about it and a note taped to it.

"Dear Percy (he read), I'm going bush for a few days. Here's the venison I promised you. It's just nicely ripe now so you needn't hang it any longer. Sorry I teased you and got you so drunk. You're a good sport. Dick. P.S. I'll come and see you if I get back."

"He means when he gets back," said Pauli.

"Yes," said Percy.

Percy opened the carton. Inside was a haunch of "nicely ripe" venison and beside it a plastic foot. On the foot was written "A souvenir from Mag."

Pauli saw the funny side of it. "What a character. What a weird sense of humor! My poor old muggins, he certainly had you on a string. He must have had it all lined up for Mrs. Pew or whatever the busybody's name is, only you came along and copped the lot."

Percy found it more difficult. "I was the sucker all right. Never mind, we'll have roast venison for dinner. It'll make a nice change."

"Pooh," said his spouse, "we will not. You go and bury it in the garden."

Percy dug a deep hole in the old strawberry patch, a place he

thought fitting, and dropped the venison in it. "In you go, you stinking flesh. Dust to dust. . . . Poor Dick. Are you digging a grave for your old mate somewhere out there in the forest? And who will bury you, Dick? Tane will take your spirit and cover your body with leaves. Such a strong old body. Such a waste. . . . In you go, poor foot. Such an elegant pink foot. Not a bit like that old bluey-white one with the big bunion that's punched forever on my memory tapes. But I won't tell Pauli. Not ever." He made a two-fingered salute. "Shcouts' honor."

(continued from page 4)

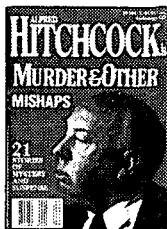
published stories—rather remarkable, we think. Mr. Poole, author of "A Day at the Lake," is a denizen of Louisiana and a computer systems programmer, his first job in that field being with the U.S. Navy. (Is there something about the military that creates writers? Hmmm.) And C. J. Hursch, author of "A Meaningful Relationship," has a Ph.D. in psychology, is a former private investigator, writes novels and short stories, writes also on a variety of nonfiction subjects

including computer books, and collects fossilized sharks' teeth.

We're glad to have all of them with us, and will pursue the military angle. (We've noticed a computer angle, too.) We'll let you know . . .

Finally, we especially want to thank Carol Inouye for her delightful illustrations for this special issue. It's unusual for us to assign all the art in one issue to one artist, but Carol rose to the occasion and then some. We hope you enjoy them as much as we have.

COMPLETE YOUR COLLECTION OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK CLASSICS!



MURDER AND OTHER MISHAPS

Want to catch a murderer? Linger in the darkness of a turreted mansion or merge with the shadows in a wax museum. Follow the written paths of these 21 outstanding practitioners of crime on paper.

SHROUDS AND POCKETS

The pockets of the wicked are filled by insurance fraud, house burglary, confidence games, forgery, drug smuggling and counterfeiting. 29 thrilling stories expose the desire for revenge, jealousy and greed; and remind us that shrouds have no pockets.



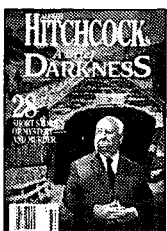
MOST WANTED

21 of our best stories from 1980-1985, that will capture your imagination and keep you enthralled through 398 action filled pages. Hard hitting crime stories, ghost stories and tales of suspense will puzzle you until the end.



THE SHADOW OF SILENCE

Twenty-eight stories—Twenty-eight occasions for nefarious activity by the likes of thieves and scoundrels, murderers and mischief-makers. Unsettling little surprises come in the mail, mystifying phone calls are made as well as received; corpses converse; and reality is tampered with.



A BRIEF DARKNESS

The stuff of which nightmare is made . . . subtly clad, so that its implications don't sink in all at once. 28 unnerving tales laced with the unexpected, clever solutions, and that Hitchcock humor.

A MYSTERY BY THE TALE

Twenty-eight great tales that will thrill, chill, divert, beguile, pique, enthrall, entertain, absorb, intrigue, galvanize, disquiet, startle, titillate, provoke, electrify, stimulate, excite, arrest, engage, deceive, seize, mystify and baffle you.



Mail to: **ALFRED HITCHCOCK
ANTHOLOGIES**
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, NJ 07462

Enclose your check or money order
for \$ _____ after indicating
your choices at right.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____
STATE/ZIP _____

- ☐ #27 MURDER & OTHER MISHAPS (\$4.50)
- ☐ #26 SHROUDS AND POCKETS (\$4.50)
- ☐ #25 MOST WANTED (\$4.95)
- ☐ #24 THE SHADOW OF SILENCE (\$4.50)
- ☐ #23 A BRIEF DARKNESS (\$4.50)
- ☐ #22 A MYSTERY BY THE TALE (\$4.50)
- ☐ #21 WORDS OF PREY (\$4.50)
- ☐ #19 GRAVE SUSPICIONS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #18 CRIME WATCH (\$3.50)
- ☐ #17 MORTAL ERRORS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #16 A CHOICE OF EVILS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #15 BORROWERS OF THE NIGHT (\$3.50)
- ☐ #14 FATAL ATTRACTIONS (\$3.50)
- ☐ #13 DEATHREACH (\$3.50)
- ☐ ANTHOLOGY #8 (\$3.50)

PLEASE ALLOW 6 TO 8 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY. AVAILABLE ONLY IN THE U.S.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

H9GC-0

Denbow's Code

by Stephen Wasylyk

Zeigler beside him, Randy drove by without even glancing at Denbow, the blue Caddy leaving a little plume of dust as it went down the lane and disappeared into the trees.

No question of where he was taking his father.

It was about time.

When a man like Zeigler sits in his house for three months because his second wife has left him, closing out everything outside its walls including the business it had taken him years to build, it's obvious that a full-time caretaker and a once-a-week doctor aren't enough.

Perhaps even where he was going wouldn't be enough.

Denbow looked up at the now-empty house at the top of the hill, gleaming white in the morning sun against a Kodachrome sky dotted with immature puffs of clouds, a cool breeze rippling the grass and caressing his skin.

New listing! Beautiful hilltop home in superb, secluded ten-acre suburban setting w/bonus of rental home for income—

Denbow didn't want to think

about that, not because he'd have to move if that was the outcome, but because it would mean Zeigler was through.

He filled a scoop with birdseed and emptied it into the platform feeder on a post thirty feet in front of his study window, wings whirring behind him before he reached the house. Acres of woodland to feed from, but the birds preferred the fast food served up in his front yard.

The pigeons swooped down first. Why they were here, he had no idea. Probably had migrated to the suburbs along with people. The others followed, the ground feeders like the juncos and doves joining the pigeons, the perchers, sparrows mostly, jostling for position on the feeder, a few finches wedging their way in along with a male cardinal, all scattering when the pigeon with a fluorescent blue band around his neck leaped up to the platform. Too big to fit under the roof, he clung to the side, wings beating frantically, neck stretched to the limit, scooping up seeds before he lost his battle with gravity and glided to

the ground. Head high and probably cursing, he stalked around the others before repeating the routine. No matter what was ordained, *he* didn't intend to eat off the ground.

He reminded Denbow of Zeigler, who had failed several times before he'd put it all together. Like the pigeon, Zeigler didn't intend to eat off the ground. He wanted to eat off the platform, alone, and he'd made it.

When he entered the house, Amanda was using the hallway mirror to brush on a touch of eye shadow. A cool, slim, long-legged woman with tightly curled dark hair and blue eyes, her pearl drop earrings added exactly the right touch of femininity to the severity of the dark suit. Style and class had never hurt when summing up before a jury.

She dropped the brush into the case, faced him and smiled.

"Pass inspection?"

"You'll knock 'em dead at the D.A.'s office."

She turned back to the mirror, eyes critical.

"I think it's time for this suit to go."

"Like Zeigler. Randy drove him away, probably to that place he mentioned. I hope they can straighten him out."

She brushed an invisible piece of lint from a shoulder and agreed with his thoughts.

"About time. Why do you think he waited so long?"

"It's difficult to convince yourself that a rock requires psychiatric help. Everyone, including Randy, thought of Zeigler as solid granite."

"His wife should have had more consideration. I feel sorry for him."

He shrugged. "None of us is unconscious during the wedding ceremony."

"Is that why you weren't too upset when *your* wife walked out?"

"Maybe. Or maybe having a sense of humor helps. When your wife runs off with a man with implanted hair and a plaid sport jacket who drives a red Corvette and who thinks Dom Perignon used to be the weatherman on Channel Six, comedy overpowers tragedy."

She smiled. "It couldn't have been that easy to take."

"I didn't say it was easy. I said it was funny."

"What are you planning for today?"

"Running the mower before the sun gets too hot and working on a report until dinner. It's due Monday."

"I'll pick up something light and see you then."

She kissed him and walked out, leaving a faint fragrance behind and a frown on his face.

He didn't recall being con-

sulted about dinner. Amanda was getting a little too proprietary, leading him where he wasn't sure he wanted to go.

He fired up the riding mower and steered it back and forth across the hillside on his side of the serpentine gravel lane, Zeigler on his mind.

Had it really been more than three years since Zeigler had called him in because his tele-marketing operation was staggering along?

Making a living by straightening out faltering businesses, Denbow had found it wiser to concentrate on cash flow and liquidity if he wished to be paid, rather than character, but he'd liked Zeigler, a short, muscular man with very little hair and the rolling walk of an athlete. When, with tie pulled down and sleeves rolled up, he'd escorted Denbow around his operation and stopped to help an employee move a heavy carton, two things were clear. A man like that paid his debts and didn't go down without a fight.

Denbow spent a week in the plant going over everything and talking to the employees. He learned that Zeigler knew their families, held their hands in grief, helped them celebrate the good occasions, lent them money, yelled when they made mistakes and then patted their shoulders when they didn't—and intruded into their

lives with suggestions and advice, solicited or not. They all loved him, so much so that when one suggested that they would be better off with a union, three muscular shippers cornered the man in a washroom and suggested he'd be happier elsewhere, even though a union would have guaranteed them all more money.

His employees weren't part of Zeigler's problem. It was his timing, his pricing, his presentation of products. What was even worse, in a business that depended on catalogues to generate sales, Zeigler's reflected nothing of his unique character and personality. Behind the counter of a retail store, those would have made him an instant success, yet his sales material was no different from anyone else's.

Like most of the problems Denbow was called on to solve, all this one required was the application of some common sense.

He threw the mower into neutral and mopped his brow as the engine idled, enjoying the warmth of the October sun on his back and the sweet smell of new-mown grass.

"Sales are up ten percent," said Zeigler over lunch. "I should give you a bonus."

"Forget it. My price is high enough."

"I hear you're looking for a place to live."

Denbow smiled. He'd casually mentioned it to one person.

"My apartment lease is running out."

Zeigler signaled the waiter. "Let's take a ride."

He turned off the highway into a narrow macadam road that ran up the side of a hill, leaving it for an easily overlooked rutted lane that led into a stand of trees. He stopped the car when the trees ended.

The lane continued diagonally upward, slicing through what must have been more than two acres of velvet lawn before ending at the top of the hill before a house, gleaming like a peaked-roof Camelot, that faced the southern sun and was protected from the north wind by a stand of trees.

Below the house and off to the right of the lane was another house. The one at the crest was traditional—white, Colonial blue shutters on the windows, broad porch overlooking the lawn. The other was more Frank Lloyd Wright—one story, of native stone, with patio and floor-to-ceiling doors.

"The big house is mine. I had the smaller one built for Randy as a wedding gift, but he won't live there. Too close to me, he says. Even his mother couldn't talk him into it."

Zeigler's voice was puzzled. It would never occur to him that

anyone would interpret generosity and concern as interference.

"I'll rent it to you, Denbow," he said.

Small-town bred and hating apartments, Denbow felt like a child looking at something in a store window beyond his reach.

He chuckled. "That's nice of you, but I couldn't afford it. A one bedroom apartment is my limit."

Zeigler put the car in gear. "I want you to meet my wife."

His first wife had been a small, delicate woman, thin and gracious and gray as a mourning dove. Zeigler underwent a transformation the moment he entered the house, humble and grateful and infinitely gentle, his devotion apparent in the softness of his voice and the way he spoke to her.

Because the loose folds of skin weren't that obvious yet and because thoughts of death had no reason to enter Denbow's mind, it wasn't until he and Zeigler were sitting on the porch overlooking the lawn and sipping coffee that he realized she was thin because she was wasting away and the young woman he'd assumed was a maid was really a nurse.

He glanced at Zeigler. In no way, at any time, had the man indicated the slightest trace of concern or worry. To him everything would be fine if you sim-

ply refused to give up. But even Zeigler couldn't defeat death. When he lost what was obviously the most important thing in the world to him, it would take time for him to recover.

"Peaceful, isn't it?" asked Zeigler. "Had some of my best ideas here."

"Renting me that house wasn't one of them," said Denbow dryly.

"What's your apartment costing you now?"

"None of your business."

Zeigler chuckled. "I figure about six hundred. Okay. I know your ex's lawyer took you to the cleaners, so that's what you pay me."

"You can get twice that or more. What the hell makes you think I need your charity?"

"What charity?" Zeigler swept a hand over the scene. "I bought this twenty years ago because I wanted to control who lived near me. The only reason I had the house built was Randy. Never thought he wouldn't want it. Now I'm stuck with it. It's a crime to let it sit vacant, but I'm certainly not going to sell it and I'll be damned if I'll rent it to just anyone. I've talked to a lot of people about you, Denbow. You're a quiet man. You go your own way and mind your own business. You know who you are and you're good at what

you do, and if someone doesn't like you, that's their problem. If you move into that house, you won't be up here annoying me, there won't be any wild parties, and there won't be any weird people wandering around."

He sliced the scene with a vertical palm and moved it to his left. "You take care of everything on that side of the lane. Pay the utilities, mow the lawn in summer, shovel the snow in winter, and leave me alone."

The houses were islands set in a sea of green and surrounded by a barrier reef of trees. No slamming of doors or loud voices in the middle of the night, no hum of traffic during the day.

Denbow kept his face impassive so that Zeigler couldn't see how much he wanted to say yes, but living two hundred feet from a man who thought he was always right, who always knew what was best for you—and worse still, never hesitated to say so—might make any price too high.

"Leaving you alone is no problem. No offense, Zeigler, but the question is—will you leave me alone? It's hard for you to stay out of people's lives. Randy knew that."

"Aw, hell, you think I don't? But only when I think I can help. You're as hard-headed as I am, Denbow. No one can tell

you anything. Nothing I can do for you. Even if I could, you'd tell me to go to hell."

He held out a hand. "Not annoying each other is part of the deal. Okay?"

Denbow put the mower in gear. Nothing he could do for him. Except rent him the house at a ridiculous figure because he knew Denbow would appreciate living there.

The following spring, the first Mrs. Ziegler had been admitted to the hospital for extended treatment, but she'd died suddenly and unexpectedly.

Zeigler had suffered the first defeat he could never turn into eventual victory.

The employees attended the funeral en masse and returned to the plant to fill orders well into the night so that no time was lost. They wouldn't have done that for the much younger second wife, their collective judgment better than Zeigler's since it wasn't distorted by love, lust, desire, or whatever else had motivated him to marry a woman thirty years his junior during a vacation in Mexico six months later.

"He couldn't seem to handle Mother's death," said Randy. "I thought a change of scene would help. The last thing I expected him to do was take up with some bimbo from San Francisco, much less marry her."

If Randy didn't realize Zeigler's marriage was a gesture, proof that he hadn't really lost the battle, Denbow didn't intend to educate him.

"Tequila, a Mexican moon, and a low-cut gown have addled the brains of many a good man," he said. "He'll get over it."

"I know that," said Randy icily. "The question is—how much will it cost him? That's what worries me."

No one expected the price to be Zeigler himself.

Denbow swerved around a granite outcrop too big to remove. Everyone is entitled to one mistake. She'd been Zeigler's. Hair that really wasn't blonde, clothes that were a little too tight and showed a little too much thigh and a little too much cleavage—as adept at playing a man as a concert pianist at playing a Steinway.

Zeigler had seen only an exciting woman who listened to his wisdom with wide eyes.

She was gone ten months later. What she took with her, other than Zeigler's heart and soul, Randy didn't say.

What Denbow didn't understand was Zeigler's continued depression. The man was too much of a fighter. Even floored twice, Zeigler should have picked himself up and staggered around the ring, looking for his opponent, not stretched

out on the canvas looking up with unseeing eyes.

He stopped the mower alongside the lane where it curved away near the top of the slope. One more pass and he was through.

On the other side of the rutted gravel, Zeigler's two-thirds of the hillside lawn was a rippling green blanket almost six inches tall.

Zeigler had been a lawn freak. He could have hired someone, but he himself mowed, sprayed, fertilized, and wandered over it in the evening with a spray bottle of weed killer zapping anything bold enough to take root.

"I like to grow things, Denbow, but I don't have time for flowers or vegetables, and riding the mower gives me time to think. When I look over it, I'm a proud man. A fine lawn isn't in Mother Nature's scheme. If you have one, you've fought her to a standstill. And I did it all alone. Not like the business. The people who work for me, and people like you, all have a part. But this lawn—" He gestured. "Don't you think you ought to do something with your section?"

"Leave my wildflowers and weeds alone, Zeigler. Mother Nature's been losing too often lately. She deserves a break."

Zeigler's once-velvet green carpet was showing the signs of

neglect. He hadn't set foot on it since his Mexico-acquired blonde had left him twisting in the wind, and Randy had turned down Denbow's offer to mow it whenever he did his.

"I'll take care of it. My father would want me to."

But Randy had a wife and home of his own and the well-fertilized grasses shot upward during the warm fall days while the weed seeds rooted themselves into the rich soil in joyful anticipation of spring. Now that it was her turn, Mother Nature was taking no pity on Zeigler.

Denbow said what the hell and steered the mower across the lane. No telling when Randy would get to it now.

He'd worked his way halfway down the slope when Randy's blue Caddy came up the lane and stopped so suddenly, it skidded on the gravel. Randy left the car and stood with hands on hips. Waiting.

Denbow waved and smiled as he approached. Randy, almost a twin of his father except for a softer face inherited from his mother, lifted a hand and drew it across his throat, face set and eyes narrowed.

Denbow cut the engine.

"We agreed that I'd take care of the lawn," snapped Randy.

"Just being neighborly," said Denbow. "Thought I'd help you out."

"No one asked you to."

"What's the problem? The mower does the work. All it's costing me is a little time, so forget it. How's your father? Any prognosis?"

The words came slowly. "It isn't as though he has appendicitis."

Denbow didn't point out that had been clear to anyone with any sense three months ago. He reached for the starter.

"I'll finish it," said Randy.

"That verges on stupidity. I'll be done in half an hour. Go do whatever you have to do."

Voice flat, Randy looked up at the house. "Stay on your own side from now on, Denbow. Nothing personal. Something between me and my father."

Denbow smiled. "Count on it. I never mow where I'm not wanted."

If Randy said anything, the roar of the engine drowned him out. His rudeness didn't surprise Denbow. Growing up as Zeigler's son couldn't have been easy, and Randy sometimes let a buried, perpetual anger show. What eluded him was who Randy was angry with—Zeigler, himself, or the world.

Halfway down the screen of his word processor the words ended, the cursor flashing accusingly. The report should have been finished an hour ago. The

project was basic, the analysis simple, but even that required a concentration that escaped him.

One of the drawbacks of his business was that he formed no lasting relationships. One project finished, he moved on to another client who was sweating out bank loan payments.

Zeigler had been an exception and even then, once the business was on its feet, the agreement not to annoy each other had been respected, their contact limited to an occasional conversation, drink, or party invitation.

Zeigler brought his new wife down one day to introduce her and Denbow had waved at her a few times as she drove by, but that was all he knew of her, except that she obviously wasn't making Zeigler happy. The man was more subdued, but facing a major mistake every morning had a way of doing that.

Denbow could neither affirm nor deny the rumor she was entertaining men in the house because there were many occasions when he had to be away, like the night she'd left. He hoped the rumor wasn't true. Often overbearing and insistent, Zeigler was still one helluva man and deserved better.

When asked, Randy had said, "She packed her bags, told my father she was leaving, and

took off." He paused. "We had no idea she'd gone back to San Francisco until the police reported her car had been at the airport garage for two weeks. I don't know why she's waiting, but I suppose we'll hear from her when she gets around to filing for divorce."

"Why wait? Have your father do it."

Randy leaned forward and spoke directly to the lamp on his desk. "Listen, Dad, there's no reason why you shouldn't divorce her."

The lamp sat there.

"You've made your point," said Denbow.

He'd walked up the hill several times to see if there was anything he could do. Robed, slippered, unshaved, uncombed, and red-eyed, Zeigler had ignored him. Maybe Zeigler hadn't even known he was there.

"Severe depression," the attendant had said. "All I can do is keep an eye on him. He might—"

"Kill himself?"

"They've been known to do that."

He hadn't gone again. It was, after all, none of his business. Like mowing the lawn.

The high-pitched whine of a four cylinder engine laboring up the slope made him frown. The day had gone fast. He stored

what he'd written on a disk, turned off the processor, and met Amanda outside.

She handed him a bag of groceries. "I see you managed to get your lawn done. And Zeigler's. I thought that wasn't part of the agreement."

"It isn't, which Randy reminded me of in no uncertain terms."

"Very rude of him. Did he say why he didn't appreciate your labors?"

He placed the bag on the counter in the kitchen.

"Seems to be one of those father-son things. As a matter of curiosity, did the police ever get involved in the sudden departure of Mrs. Zeigler?"

She smiled as she slipped off her jacket. "Are you using an intimate relationship with an assistant county district attorney to elicit police information?"

"What other reason can there be for an intimate relationship?"

She kissed him and began to unpack the bag. "Okay. Since no missing persons report was filed, we knew nothing until the Philadelphia police notified us about the car at the airport parking garage. Randy told the officer who contacted him what had happened."

"That was it?"

"Not entirely. One of the

county detectives, who was born with a suspicious nature, checked the flights to San Francisco on the date of the parking stub and turned up a credit card slip for one way, first class passage, signed by the Zeigler woman, and a reservation clerk who recalled a very sexy, thirtyish blonde woman." She held out a head of lettuce with loose green leaves. "Would you like to take care of the salad?"

"No. I'll handle the wine bottle. Did you happen to know that Randy's wife is also blonde, thirtyish, and very sexy?"

She smiled. "You're as suspicious as the detective. He asked the San Francisco police to look into it. They didn't have to look far. Several of them already knew her as a middle level hooker. When they found her, she was living far above her usual style, and they were relieved to learn her upward mobility was achieved through the legitimacy of marriage." She turned to face him. "Just what the hell are you getting at, anyway?"

"I wish I knew," said Denbow slowly. "Any good, All-American busybody would have learned all of this long ago. My problem is I overdo minding my own business. Since I like it that way, I assume others do, too. Zeigler is as much of a friend as I have and maybe, if

I were a different person, I could have helped him somehow."

He placed both hands on the sink and looked out the window at the house on the hill.

"You know, two weeks or so before she left him, I woke in the middle of the night with the feeling that someone was calling my name. I must have listened for two or three minutes. Didn't hear a thing. I remembered I'd been listening to the radio while fixing a late bite and turned it down when the phone rang. Maybe I'd forgotten to turn it off. There was a full moon that night so I didn't turn on any lights when I went out to the kitchen. I happened to look out this window. The moonlight turned everything silver except for a dark figure in a loose robe standing at the top of the lane."

The rustling of things being removed from the paper bag stopped.

"Scared the hell out of me. Thought it was the Dark Angel and my time had come until I recognized Zeigler. He stood there in the moonlight for a minute or two before walking back to his house."

Denbow turned from the window to find Amanda staring at him.

"With my superb sensitivity and caring nature, I never re-

alized until after his wife left that he'd probably started down the hill to talk to me and stopped because it was the middle of the night and he'd remembered our agreement not to annoy each other. If I had any sense, I'd have walked out there and called him back."

She folded her arms. "And now you're off on some sort of guilt trip."

"No. Talking to him might not have changed a thing. What I'm thinking of is that he turned to me for help and he still needs that. Something happened that night she left that took the heart out of him. It's finally dawned on me that it would take far more than a wife, whom he probably wanted to get rid of anyway, walking out on him."

She smiled. "You and the detective. That's why he checked it out."

He shrugged. "Maybe he should have followed up."

"We don't have the time or budget to chase psychological guesswork."

"Let's see if we can come up with more than that."

He took her by the waist and lifted her to the counter.

She put her arms around his neck. "If you intend to get amorous, I prefer the bedroom."

He removed her hands and stepped back. "Romance comes later. At the moment, you're

testifying from the witness chair as an expert in foul play."

She crossed her legs and hiked her skirt to mid-thigh.

"Is that for my benefit or the jury's?"

"Don't get excited, counselor. Simply playing the part."

He clasped his hands behind his back and paced the kitchen.

"The consensus is that the second Mrs. Zeigler left Mr. Zeigler to return to San Francisco."

"Women leave their husbands every day."

"Ah, but most have a compelling reason. What reason could Mrs. Zeigler have? She wasn't abused, she had her Mercedes and several unlimited credit cards, and if she wanted to visit San Francisco, Mr. Zeigler would probably have driven her to the airport and bought the ticket for her."

"Perhaps she simply wanted to shed Mr. Zeigler."

"Again, ah. She could do that by divorcing him. Preferably here. The courts undoubtedly would have granted her a beneficial financial arrangement. Or she could have filed from San Francisco, but she hasn't. Furthermore, by fleeing to San Francisco, she presented Mr. Zeigler with grounds to institute a divorce action as the injured party, which could well cost her money. Mrs. Zeigler is

not the type to do anything that would cost her money. Why should she suddenly leave when it was to her benefit to stay?"

"Obviously, counselor, the benefits of leaving outweighed the benefits of staying."

"Your report from the San Francisco police shows this to be true, but why would any man be so generous to a wife living in San Francisco, where she could do nothing to—" Denbow cleared his throat discreetly "—earn her subsistence? Does this arrangement suggest something to you?"

The blue eyes were cool and steady. "You're leading the witness. You want me to say Zeigler paid her to leave."

"Try this—his transformation into a psychiatric gold mine and her high life in San Francisco were not a coincidence."

"You're suggesting blackmail?"

"I bow to your expertise."

"What could he have done that would allow her to blackmail him?"

"Ask Randy. If she's getting money, it has to be from him. Zeigler doesn't even remember what a check is, much less how to write one out."

She lifted her hands. "Get me down, Denbow."

"You don't buy my magnificent analysis? People pay me good money to be so smart."

"I buy it, all right, but this is Saturday and I've looked forward all day to spending the weekend with you. The Zeigler matter can wait until Monday, which won't hurt at all since it's already waited for three months." She slapped the head of lettuce into his palm. "Now get started on the salad. I'm hungry."

He woke suddenly, just as he had on the night he'd thought he heard Zeigler calling him. The red numerals in the radio alarm clock said it was a few minutes after two. Beside him, Amanda breathed softly.

Damn. This wasn't one of those heavy-eyed wakeups triggered by who-knows-what that could be dismissed by rolling over and burying his face in the pillow. He was wide awake. *Really* wide awake. One of those might-as-well-get-up-and-make-the-coffee episodes.

He slid out of bed carefully. No point in punishing Amanda.

Listening to the gurgle of the coffee maker, as alert and wide awake as he'd ever been in his life, he knew that his eyes would begin to close about mid-afternoon, when he'd be in the middle of finishing his report. One way or another, his body always extracted eight hours of sleep.

Perhaps something in his

subconscious had bypassed the block he'd run into this afternoon and was telling him to get it done now.

Taking his coffee with him, he turned on the processor and stared at the flashing cursor on screen. The words still eluded him. Whatever his mind was trying to tell him, it had nothing to do with the report.

He returned to the bedroom and stared out the window, sipping his coffee. A full moon, as on the night he'd seen Zeigler; the hilltop and the lane silver. The warm afternoon sun long gone, the night air now carrying the chill of fall. It was the time of harvest and frost on the pumpkin and Halloween—and the last time he'd seen Zeigler laugh.

Zeigler had given a Halloween costume party to introduce his new wife, and the lane had been edged with luminescent figures of ghosts and witches and black cats leading up to the house. Feeling no pain as the convivial host, Zeigler had climbed on a table and recited a children's poem about ghouls and ghosties and things that go bump in the night.

"Paul?"

Amanda's white form had raised itself on an elbow.

"What are you doing?"

"Thinking about things that go bump in the night."

"How about waiting until

dawn and things that go bump in daylight?"

The coffee cup stopped halfway to his lips.

"I'll be damned," he said.

"Two thirty in the morning is not a time for self-recrimination. Come back to bed."

He placed the cup on the nightstand and turned on the light. "Let me have your keys. Your car is blocking me in."

"Where are you going?"

He threw the robe aside and slipped into shorts and a T-shirt. "To look for something that goes bump in daylight. Don't ask if I'm crazy. Just give me the keys."

She threw back the covers. "Oh no. Where my car goes, I go."

He grinned. "Like that? Not that I have any objection to nudity, but you'll find those vinyl seats a little cold."

She sighed. "Mother was right. If he laughs when he sees you naked instead of being overcome with flaming passion, the romance is over."

"Only waning. I'll need something from the garage, so I'll meet you outside. No need to dress formally and makeup isn't necessary."

Five minutes later, wearing slacks and one of his sweaters, she started the engine. "Where are we going?"

"Up the hill to Zeigler's house."

"We could have walked."

"We'll need the headlights."

"With this moon?"

He told her to stop in front of the house, walked slowly back and forth across the lawn, returned, and said, "Move over."

He made a U-turn so that the headlights flooded across the grass.

She joined him in their glare. "Exactly what are you doing?"

"Trim the grass on Zeigler's lawn close enough, and you'd have an enormous putting green. It's all as smooth as silk, but when I was mowing I hit a couple of bumps about here. I thought nothing of it at the time. Could have been the earth settling after a tree trunk cut below ground level rotted away."

"It all looks level to me."

"It would. The mower blade sort of floats over small depressions. The mower wheels don't."

He probed with a foot. "There it is." Crushing the grass with the toe of one shoe, he worked his way around the perimeter, his blood running colder with each step as the outline of the depression took shape.

He finished with a rectangle about two feet wide and six long.

She let her breath out slowly. "I hope that isn't what it looks like."

Using the pointed spade he'd thrown into the car, he cut through the sod in the center

and placed it aside, lifting out the soft dirt beneath until he met a stiffer resistance.

Once more. Gently. And the spade brought up bones that were once a human hand and released a faint stench into the cool, clean night air.

"*Oh-my-God.*"

Covering her mouth, Amanda fled to the car and braced herself with hands on the hood.

He threw the spade aside and joined her.

Her voice was a hoarse whisper. "Why didn't anyone—"

He knew what she meant. "The sod was cut and lifted, the grave dug and the sod replaced. Within a week it would have been unnoticeable. It took a little time to settle, but now we know why Randy didn't want me mowing on this side of the lane. It *has* to tie in with what happened to Zeigler."

Her voice was still hoarse. "Who can it be?"

"Don't ask me. I'm just a poor fool who had a hunch. Ask Randy. And Mrs. Zeigler. You can start proceedings to have her escorted back from San Francisco on Monday."

"Monday? *Monday?*" Her voice trembled with sudden fury. "Try dawn. Try two hours. Try *one* hour. *Dammit, how can anyone—*"

Denbow took her in his arms and held her trembling body tightly, her face against his cool

and clammy from shock.

"Take it easy," he whispered. "Remember your job. Start earning that generous salary they're paying you by setting the wheels of law and order in motion."

If the day before had gone fast, this one had gone slowly. The sun was low before his processor-driven typewriter had chattered through the last page of his report.

Up on the hill, the grave was now a gaping hole surrounded by yellow tape, and much of Zeigler's golf-green lawn had been trampled by a horde of lawmen and an army of newspeople, from whom Denbow escaped by locking the doors and drawing the drapes.

The straining sound of the four cylinder engine drove him to the kitchen to fix two drinks. When Amanda came through the open patio door, he handed her a glass. She slumped into a chair and kicked off her shoes.

"Mind if I use our intimate relationship to elicit police information again? Did Randy talk or not? Who was in the grave—"

She took a long drink. "It's all very weird and senseless."

"When a body gets buried in a front yard, it can't be anything else."

"The corpse was a twenty-

two-year-old kid named Grover, who worked for Zeigler. Nice, bright kid. From a small town upstate. Late that afternoon, Grover received a call. His mother was in the hospital. He went to Zeigler to tell him he had to leave and why. Randy was in the office at the time. Zeigler asked if he needed money. Grover said he had bus fare, but that was about all. Zeigler gave him a hundred dollars."

"That's the Zeigler I knew."

"Four hours later, Randy was working at the plant, alone, when the night bell rang. There was Grover. He'd been mugged in the men's room at the bus station in Philadelphia. All he had left was his commuter pass. He didn't know what else to do, so he came back and walked to the plant, hoping someone would be there and he could borrow some money. Like a lot of people today, Randy doesn't carry much cash. He uses credit cards. The banks were closed, of course, but there are those cash machines. He drove Grover over, intending to use his cash access card. Either the machine malfunctioned or it had run out. He couldn't get a dime out of it."

"What else is new?" murmured Denbow.

"Zeigler wasn't available. He was having dinner in town with a supplier, but Randy knew he

kept cash for emergencies in a safe at the house, and as far as he was concerned, this was an emergency. He drove Grover there. But Zeigler wasn't in town after all. Since you were away, he'd hidden his car in your garage and was waiting in the dark to see who his wife was entertaining when he wasn't at home." She took another long drink. "If this doesn't make much sense, be patient. It gets worse."

"I assumed it would."

"Randy parked in the lane at the front of the house, in the dark, where the light over the garage didn't reach, because he said it was easier to back down to your driveway and turn around rather than go all the way up to the garage apron at the side of the house and maneuver around up there."

Denbow nodded. "I've seen him leave the car there when he visited."

"It was too dark for Zeigler to recognize the car or see there were two men. He waited by the side door. Grover was first to come around the corner into the light. Zeigler leaped to the fastest wrong conclusion in history. There could be only one reason for the kid he'd given a hundred dollars to that afternoon, supposedly to visit a sick mother, to drive up to his house. Talk about adding insult to injury.

He hit him. Grover fell back into Randy just as he came around the corner. They both went down. Only Randy got up. Grover was dead, skull fractured by one of the stones edging the driveway."

The taste had gone out of the drink. Denbow set it aside.

"Instant panic. Randy yelling at his father, his father yelling at Randy. When Zeigler realized what he'd done, he came apart. By that time Mrs. Zeigler was out of the house. When Randy started inside to call the police, she stopped him. His father would be arrested, go on trial for manslaughter, might even receive a prison sentence. Did he want that? Who knew Grover was there? No one. Who was more important, Grover or his father? She kept reinforcing the questions with shots of straight scotch. Zeigler was sitting on the ground, staring at his fist. Before he knew it, Randy was digging a hole. Don't worry, his stepmother kept telling him. Only the three of them would know. All he had to do was keep his mouth shut. When his father came out of it, he'd be grateful his son had protected him."

"She has to be one helluva saleswoman."

"Randy bought the idea only long enough to bury Grover, but by then he figured it was

too late. He had another problem. Zeigler hadn't moved. If he wasn't back to normal by morning, people would wonder why. Tell them it was her fault, she said. She'd been thinking of going back to the West Coast. She'd go now. He could blame her. He gave her the money from the safe and promised to send more. Everything was under control. He'd worry about his next step when his father came around. He waited. And waited. Until yesterday.

"Didn't anyone ever ask about Grover?"

"Of course. His family called when he didn't come home, but the last time anyone had seen him, he'd been heading for the bus station, so it was assumed he'd disappeared somewhere between Philadelphia and his home town."

She finished her drink and rested her head against the back of the chair, her voice flat. "I feel cold. Is it the story I just told you or that open door?"

Sun almost gone, the thermometer was falling. He rose and closed the patio door, looking out at the deepening shadows.

"What happens now?"

"Randy and the fast talking Mrs. Zeigler are guilty of the illegal disposition of a body to cover up a crime, but because of the motive and their position in the community, no judge will

be too hard. Zeigler? Nothing. A man who isn't aware of the proceedings can't be prosecuted."

Curiosity about a vaguely remembered bump in an otherwise level lawn had driven him into the night in the hope that he could somehow help Zeigler, but nothing had turned up that would help him at all.

His reflection in the glass stared back at him. Beyond, in the growing dark, he also seemed to see Zeigler. In a way, the man was a shadow of himself. They lived differently but followed the same code, which was why they got along so well from the day they met. The code said others could lie, cheat, and steal. They would not, even in retaliation.

Analyzing businesses, separating causes from effects and looking for solutions had given him a sixth sense. The pieces fit or they didn't—and these pieces didn't fit. He couldn't believe accidentally killing Grover would push a man like Zeigler over the edge, any more than the departure of a wife he didn't care about.

There had to be a flaw in the story somewhere.

When the thought came, he couldn't erase it. Like the one solution to any problem, it stood pure and shining and unassailable. He turned to Amanda. Her eyes were closed.

He bent and whispered into her ear. "Randy lied about what happened."

The eyes remained closed. "Lied? That's one helluva story to dream up."

"He didn't dream it up. He reversed the roles. Listen to me carefully. Zeigler was working late, not Randy, which is more likely. Zeigler didn't have much cash on him. He never did. Zeigler couldn't operate the cash access machine. Anything with keys on it always baffled him. That's why he kept money in the house safe. And because of the late hour, it was like him to take Grover along, intending to give him the money, drive him in to the station, and put him on a bus. So Zeigler drives up to that house on the hill and he walks in on something that takes the heart out of him and sends him into a depression so deep the mind mechanics may take years to find him, much less bring him out of it. One guess as to what it was."

She sat silent for a few moments, then the eyes opened, the shoes were on, and she was headed for the door, tossing the words back over her shoulder. "Damn you, Denbow. I wish you'd stop thinking so that I can get some sleep."

The phone rang two hours later.

"I've had enough of your fertile brain, Denbow. I'm at home."

"That's too bad. Dinner is waiting, the wine chilling, the table set, and the candles ready."

"Bloodshot eyes ain't romantic, even by candlelight."

"Don't you pay attention to commercials? I have a little bottle of the stuff that clears that up in seconds. What did Randy have to say this time?"

"Exactly what you thought he'd say. His father caught him and his sexy stepmother in the most embarrassing of all situations and it shocked Zeigler's mind loose from its moorings."

"I knew it had to be something that gross, but don't tell me the sight made poor Grover faint and hit his head."

"Since Zeigler was out of it, Randy jumped all over Grover, wanting to know what they were doing there. Grover told him. Whether his father came out of it or not, Randy knew the story stopped with him. Grover, though, was edging toward the door to tell the world. Randy was about to become national Sleaze-of-the-Month, but there'd be no television interview or book contract. He'd be finished. With his wife and family, at the plant, and especially in the community. The way people felt about his father—"

"—they'd start a movement to bring back tarring and feathering."

"Furious, blaming Grover for the whole thing, he ran after

him, picked up a rock and hit him. It was obvious by then that Zeigler would be no problem for some time, so he and Mrs. Strike-It-Rich worked out the details. Feel smug about bringing him to justice?"

"I don't give a damn about him. All I was concerned about was Zeigler. Now that the psychiatrists know the real cause of his depression, they should find it a great deal easier to bring him around."

"What made you realize Randy was lying?"

"Zeigler and I subscribed to the same code. If I'd never lower myself to skulk around in the dark to catch a cheating wife,

neither would he."

"Some code. Look where it got him. But that little bit of information might come in handy some day, so maybe I should change my mind about dinner. Does the code prevent you from taking advantage of a woman who falls asleep over the entree?"

Silverware gleaming, the table set before him. Precise. Perfect. And empty.

"You're the only exception. Taking advantage of you under any and all circumstances is mandatory."

"Best clause in the code, Denbow. Light the candles. I'm on my way."

An Attractive Family

by Robert Arthur

The Farringtons were a rather attractive family, if you don't mind overlooking a few bad habits—such as committing murder. And it is probably not fair to speak of murder as being a habit with them. After all, they had only committed it twice.

However, they were well on the way to making it a habit. Even now they were planning to make the figure two into a three. But they were not looking sinister, nor whispering to each other. They were discussing the subject frankly and openly as they sat in the parlor of East View, the summer home they had rented on the Massachusetts coast at a spot where the rather steep, rocky cliffs fell away to the brawling waves of the Atlantic.

They were even drinking tea as they talked. At least Marion Farrington was—tea with lemon. Bert Farrington, her uncle, was also drinking tea, but his was laced with Jamaican rum. Dick, her younger brother, was drinking scotch and soda, which looks like tea but isn't.

"It's really a pity the child must have her birthday in two weeks," Marion Farrington said. "It forces us to act."

Dick, who was thirty-two, well-built, tanned, and handsome, obviously accustomed to living well and spending money freely, glanced out the window. Jinny Wells was visible across the open field, just at the edge of the woods. She seemed, from a distance, almost the child that Marion had called her, although Jinny was almost twenty-one—a twenty-one that, based upon past performance charts of the Farrington family, she was not likely to reach. At the moment Jinny seemed to be searching the ground for small objects which she popped into a basket on her arm.

"She's quite a pretty thing," Dick commented. "And I do think she admires me." He straightened his tie. "If we could only put it off for a little longer—"

"Aha!" Bert Farrington, who was plump and red-featured, twenty years older than his nephew, wagged a finger at him. "Mustn't get sentimental, Dick. The future of the Family is at stake." He said

it that way, with a capital F, as if he were speaking of the British Empire or the State of Texas.

"Bert's right." Marion sat erect, a full-bodied forty-two, attractive if you overlooked the set of her chin and the determination that glinted in her pale blue eyes. "On Jinny's twenty-first birthday we have to make an accounting of the estate, under the terms of Alice's will. We might manage to postpone it for a few weeks, but eventually her lawyer would force the issue. You know what the result would be."

Dick drained his glass in a nervous sort of way while he thought of all the money Alice had left him that was now gone, including half of what she had left Jinny. "Money certainly doesn't go far these days," he said.

"The inflation," Bert said, in a philosophical manner. After all, if anyone went to jail it would be Dick, as trustee of Jinny's estate, rather than Bert. Just the same, Bert, having sponged off his niece and nephew for fifteen years now, and hoping to continue to do so indefinitely, was willing to go to any reasonable lengths to help keep Dick out of jail. After all, Dick would soon have to find another rich wife to marry, and that was seldom accomplished in jail.

Dick refilled his scotch and soda. "I could take her out for a sail in the bay and capsize."

Bert frowned. "I think not," he said. "After all, Alice went by drowning."

"And Harry too, when we capsized fifteen years ago," Marion said. "Three drownings would seem entirely too many to be coincidental."

Harry had been Marion's first, and only, husband. A wealthy apple grower in Oregon, whom she had married at a time when the family finances were at rock bottom, he had survived only seven weeks of matrimonial bliss. The waters in Puget Sound can also be quite tricky, and when the sailboat overturned Marion had been too concerned with helping her younger brother Dick (who was a splendid swimmer) to give her non-swimming husband a hand. Soon he was out of reach. He had been only forty feet away, but unhappily the forty feet had all been straight down.

Alice, Dick's only wife—to date—had drowned only two years before, while swimming off a lonely beach at Acapulco, Mexico. Alice had been a dull, rather homely girl with a thin, curveless body, but she had been a splendid swimmer. When she met Dick—whose car had broken down in the small Midwestern town



"THE SHADOWS SUDDENLY CAME TO LIFE AND STARTED CREEPING TOWARD ME. THERE WAS A TERRIBLY HIGH CEILING, AND DOWN FROM THE DARKNESS CAME A ROPE. . . ."

where she lived and who had visited the local swimming pool to while away the time until it was fixed—she had been overwhelmed with wonder that he found her attractive. No other man ever had, though possibly some might have if they had known, as Dick did, that she had a half interest in a two hundred thousand dollar estate, left in trust for her and her sister Jinny by their father.

Dick had been hoping for a better figure, using both meanings of the word, but a balance in the bank has always been worth two on the wing. He had therefore seized the opportunity and eloped with her, and he and Bert and Marion had jointly taken her off to Mexico to honeymoon. Alice had exulted in long swims out into the blue Pacific. Sometimes, when Dick was weary, she had swum alone. From one of these lonely swims she had not returned.

Cramps, said the Mexican authorities when her body finally washed ashore. But it may have been the overpowering lethargy brought on by sedatives mixed with the black coffee she loved to drink before starting a swim.

Anyway, now her money was gone, Jinny was almost twenty-one, and the share Alice had left her pretty sister, and which had been nibbled at, must be accounted for. The Farringtons, if a little provoked at Fate for forcing another murder upon them, were nevertheless facing up to their burden.

"It must be clearly an accident," Marion said.

"Don't give any gossip a chance to get started," Bert agreed.

"Perhaps a picnic out by the old Cliff Point House," Dick suggested. "It's a long drop to the rocks."

"If we can't think of anything better," Marion said. "But shhh—she's coming back now."

They watched the slender girl come across the field, the basket on her arm. Halfway to the house, she waved to a small man in a large checked cap who rode by on a bicycle. The small man was Mr. Downey, who had rented the next house for the summer. Mr. Downey was a bookish man whose hobby was geology and who rode hither and yon on his bicycle, chipping bits off rocks.

"Speaking of sleeping," Bert murmured, "do you suppose the girl is psychic?"

"What do you mean?" Marion asked.

"These nightmares she's been having the last two weeks since she came here to visit us. Every other night. Nightmares about big, dark figures closing in on her, whispering things she can't

make out." He coughed slightly. "What I mean is do you suppose she—"

"Of course the girl's not psychic," Marion said. "She's just undernourished and nervous, like so many modern girls. Also, she studied too hard at school. Imagine a chit like her, not yet twenty-one, graduating from college. However, no matter what's causing her nightmares, I'm glad of them. The whole town knows about them, and Dr. Barnes can testify her nerves aren't strong—that's why I insisted she go see him. So no matter what happens—"

She broke off as the front door opened. A moment later Jinny Wells entered the room.

Jinny was a slender girl, small-boned, with a delicate, wistful oval face and a slow, soft-voiced manner of speaking. Her cheeks were pink now with heat and exertion, her dark eyes dancing.

"Oh, I found some!" she cried. "Found some mushrooms. Look!"

Her eyes, wide and admiring, smiled at Dick, who smiled back. She handed the basket to Marion, who glanced into it.

"Why, child—" Marion began, then recovered herself smoothly. "You've done well," she said. "You shall have them for supper. Take them out to the kitchen; I'll fix them myself."

"Oh, thank you, Marion," Jinny said. "But we'll all have them." She turned to go, and her lashes fluttered as she peeped at Dick beneath them. Then she went lightly out with her basket of mushrooms.

"Well, that takes care of that," Marion said when Jinny had gone. "She's mixed in some of the most deadly kind of mushrooms with edible ones that look a lot like it. What is the name of that mushroom, that terribly poisonous one? No matter, there's quite enough to kill her. And she picked them herself and showed them to Mr. Downey, next door. We'll be in the clear—quite in the clear."

At last, Marion thought, her education was coming to some use. Which might still not be the case if it weren't for that course she'd taken in botany.

The Farringtons were a rather attractive family, but like most of us, they sometimes got into an ugly humor. They were in one now as they sat in the fusty parlor. They were so upset that they could have killed someone.

The clock said eleven at night. The evening had gone badly. Marion had cooked a tasty dinner with wild rice and duckling, including a special side dish of mushrooms just for Jinny. There

weren't enough to go around, she had said firmly. Jinny had picked them and Jinny should have them. And she wished she didn't have to include the edible ones, but the one portion would have been too skimpy without them.

Jinny had wriggled with joy at the idea of eating something she had actually garnered from Nature all by herself. Half a dozen times she started on them, meanwhile keeping up a lively chatter about her year at college. Each time, as they waited in frozen expectancy, she had stopped to tell them of some other funny incident of school life. But she, finally, put the dish firmly before her and started eating. She had eaten at least three of the mushrooms from her side dish of fatal and non-fatal types when the phone rang. As bouncy as a small boy, Jinny leaped up to answer it. And the dish of mushrooms had fallen to the floor and scattered across the rug.

Jinny was painfully embarrassed, but there had been nothing to do save throw the mushrooms in the garbage can. As for the phone call, it had only been from their tiresome neighbor, Mr. Downey, inviting them to tea the following afternoon.

They had waited hopefully for nature to take its course, if the three mushrooms Jinny had eaten were of the fatal type. But Jinny had gone up to bed quite healthy and now the Farringtons were under the annoying necessity of figuring out some other way to dispose of her. It was really very thoughtless of the girl to put them to so much trouble.

"It will have to be a fall from the cliff," Marion said. "I told Mr. Downey we couldn't come to tea because we were going on a picnic. Very well, we will go on a picnic. Jinny will see a very special flower she wants to pick, clinging dangerously to the side of the cliff. She will start down for it and slip and—well, we just weren't close enough to catch her."

She spoke very convincingly. It almost sounded as if Jinny were already lying broken and lifeless on the cruel rocks, and as a consequence, they all felt much better. Then suddenly a piercing scream from the bedroom above them made them look up. Again came the scream—and again, a tremolo of horror that made the cut glass chandelier tinkle timorously.

Hope sprang in Marion's eyes.

"The mushrooms!" she exclaimed.

"Dash it!" Bert said. "She'll wake the whole neighborhood. Can't she die quietly?"

Screams from above continued to indicate that she couldn't.

"*Amanita virosa*!" Marion exclaimed, with awe. "Why that's the name I couldn't think of. It—it just came to me. No mushroom is deadlier."

There was another scream.

"We'll have to go up," Marion told them. "Mr. Downey is sure to have heard her by now. Come on, Dick."

She and Dick ran up the stairs and flung open Jinny's door. Jinny was sitting up in bed, her hands pressed to her mouth, trying to stifle another scream.

"Jinny!" Marion hurried to her. "What is it? Do you feel bad?"

Jinny shook her head, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

"No pain?" Marion was eager, rather than solicitous.

"It was—another nightmare. The—the worst of all."

They heard a window go up. A voice called, "Hello! Anything wrong over there?"

"That you, Mr. Downey?" Dick stepped to Jinny's window. "Jinny had another nightmare, that's all. She's all right now."

"Oh," Mr. Downey said. "Oh."

The window went down again. Dick came back and sat on the side of the bed, holding Jinny's soft hand in his.

"Tell us about it, Jinny," he urged. "That's the best way to get over it."

Jinny's breathing was more normal now. She flushed delicately, and tried to pull the sheet up around her.

"It was—so real," she said. "I was in a great, dark room, in some strange old house all tumbling down and full of shadows. And the shadows suddenly came to life and started creeping toward me. There was a terribly high ceiling and down from the darkness came a rope. It had a noose in the end of it. And the shadows all pushed me toward the noose and I knew they wanted me to put it around my neck, and they pushed closer and closer until I couldn't breathe. Then all of a sudden the noose twisted itself right around my throat and—and—"

She gasped and began to tremble. Marion produced a pill and a glass of water.

"Take this, Jinny," she said. "Get some sleep. It was just a dream, that's all."

"Yes, of course," Jinny whispered. "Just a—dream. Thank you, Marion."

She took the pill, drank, lay back on the pillow. Dick gave her hand a little squeeze.

"See you in the morning, Jinny."

He went out softly. And Marion and Bert followed him on tiptoe, like loving parents leaving the side of their sleeping child.

It was a perfect summer morning. The horoscope in the daily paper said, "Today is a good day for carrying out projects you have been putting off." Bert, who always read the horoscopes, showed it to Marion.

"Yes, we've waited too long," Marion said, and frowned. "We'll finish this thing up today. Jinny's nightmare last night has given us just the opportunity we need." She reached for the phone.

"Hello," she said to the operator. "I want to make a long distance call to Boston. Person to person to Dr. M. J. Brewer. He's a famous psychiatrist. I don't know his address, but I'm sure you'll be able to locate him. It's very important . . . Yes, call me back."

She hung up and turned to Bert.

"I already phoned Dr. Barnes," she said. "Told him about Jinny's nightmares and said I was dreadfully worried. He suggested Brewer. I'll make an appointment with Brewer and explain all about Jinny's fits of depression and the time she took too many sleeping pills—"

"When was that?" Bert asked.

"Don't be tiresome, Bert. The thing is, the child is melancholy, subject to depression, thinks of suicide. After all the buildup I gave the call, the operator is sure to listen in and spread the story. So will Mrs. Graves and Miss Bernham, on the party line—I heard their receivers picked up. Jinny is over now apologizing to Mr. Downey for waking him up last night. By evening the whole town will know about Jinny's dream, her suicidal tendencies, instability, everything. Then this afternoon, for the picnic, we'll go to Black Point. You know the old house in the woods there?"

"Yes," Bert nodded. "What about it?"

"Why, it will be the most natural thing in the world—oh, there's the phone . . . Hello? Dr. Brewer? . . . Dr. Brewer, it's urgent that I make an appointment with you for as soon as possible. You see—"

The Farringtons were a rather attractive family, especially on an occasion such as this, all of them off to a picnic.

Marion had packed a hamper with food, and Bert had packed a

small hamper with wine and other drinks. Dick drove the car far out on the lonely cliffs to the region known as Black Point. The evergreens grew tall with cathedral-like shade and quiet beneath them. Dick helped Jinny tenderly over the rough spots. His fingers caressed her bare arms as he helped her sit down on the edge of the rocky cliff, in the sunshine, the Atlantic combers crashing on the rocks far below. Sea gulls screamed; there was a smell of salt spray in the air. Jinny breathed deeply.

"It smells so fresh and clean," she whispered. "It makes me forget all about last night—that horrible nightmare—" Her eyes clouded, but Dick's admiring gaze brought her good spirits back. "But there, I'm not going to talk about it any more. Let's eat. I'm starved!"

They ate. Bert told humorous stories of his travels in Europe, neglecting to mention that he had been in Europe because of an embezzlement in the U.S.A. Marion was witty, and her stories about the townspeople were also malicious. Dick sat close beside Jinny and held her hand whenever he could, leaning close to her and whispering in her ear from time to time that she was lovely. Jinny flushed, and her eyes laughed, and she looked more than ever like a child on the happiest day of her life.

The sun sank behind the pines. Shadows grew longer. A chill seeped into the air.

"Why don't you two take a walk?" Marion asked. "Bert and I will clean up."

Dick was on his feet at once, helping Jinny.

"Come along," he said gaily. "We'll explore."

Laughing, Jinny allowed herself to be drawn along. Dick slipped her small hand into his large hand.

"Glorious day," he said with a wide gesture. "Enjoying it?"

"Oh, yes. Except that—looking at the sea—made me think of Alice."

"I know." Dick looked solemn. "She loved the sea—too much. Couldn't keep her out of the water."

"Did you love her very much, Dick?" Jinny asked.

"Very much indeed," Dick said, nodding. "They were the happiest three weeks of my life. Then—she was taken from me."

"She loved you, too," Jinny told him. "You should have seen her face when she told me she was going to marry you. It was transformed. She couldn't imagine what you saw in her. She was so plain."

"Plain?" Dick was indignant. "I never thought of her as plain. To me she was lovely, lovely . . ."

"I always thought she was rather dull," Jinny said ingenuously. "All she could do was swim. She couldn't talk well and she didn't like books or music or—"

"Please, Jinny!" Dick's voice was suddenly brusque. "You forget that we were in love. It upsets me to talk about her. I still—miss her terribly, terribly . . ."

"Of course," Jinny said, with swift contrition. "I'm sorry, Dick. Oh, look— isn't that a house ahead of us?"

"An abandoned house!" Dick exclaimed. "Maybe it's haunted!"

The house they had come upon, buried in the woods, was huge and a dismal brown in color. Part of the roof had fallen in. The wide verandah was sagging. Most of the windows were broken. An air of dark desolation hung over it, brooding.

Jinny drew in a deep breath. "I don't like it," she said. "Let's go back, Dick."

But Dick had hold of her hand and was pulling her toward the old ruin with masculine enthusiasm.

"Let's look inside," he coaxed. "Say hello to the ghost. No telling what we'll find."

Jinny tried to hold back, but willy-nilly she came along with him, half running.

"Dick, it—scares me. It's so dark—and gloomy. It's like my nightmare last night—"

"Aw, that was only a dream. Now don't be a child, Jinny. Come on, let's see what's inside."

Reluctantly Jinny followed him onto the verandah, which swayed and creaked beneath them. Together they peeked through the doorless doorway. Inside was darkness, a smell of moldy plaster and termite-infested wood, the tiny chittering of rats, curious creaks and rustlings.

Jinny shivered. "Please, Dick! I feel—so scared. I know it's irrational, but please let's go back."

"That would be the worst thing you could do, giving in to your fears. Come on inside."

Dick pulled, and Jinny went in with him.

Inside the gloom was worse. But they could see the holes in the plaster, the leprous stains on the walls, the broken stairway leading to the next floor—and the rope that hung from an old hook in the ceiling.

It was an old rope, a frayed rope, but it seemed to twist and curl gently, as if alive, as if hungry, as if waiting. And it ended in a noose.

"My dream!" Jinny cried in terror. "It's happening. This old house—this room—the rope. Dick!" She tugged to free herself. "Let's run!"

Dick held her tightly.

"Don't be silly," he said. "This is how to cure yourself. Go over, touch the rope, prove to yourself it's just an old rope someone left hanging there."

"No, oh no! See how it—twists."

"Sure. It's drafty. The windows are all busted in this place."

And Jinny found herself almost lifted across the creaking floor, to stand below the dangling noose that waited like an open mouth.

"Jinny," Dick said softly, gently. "Here's an old stool. Stand on it—put the noose around your neck. Then take it off again. Do that, and you'll never have nightmares again. You'll be too brave for them. I promise you."

"No, I can't." Jinny shuddered and then with a sudden do-or-die effort wrestled free of Dick's arms. "I can't."

"You must, Jinny." This time it was Marion who spoke. Somehow, Marion and Bert had materialized in the doorway, like two shadows coming out of the woodwork. Soon they stood close behind Jinny, touching her, hemming her in. She stood there, trembling violently, like a wild thing caught in a trap.

"This is for your own good, child." Marion's voice was soft, almost gentle. "It will help you get over the nightmare habit. The doctor suggested it. Dick, put the stool in place. Bert, lift her up."

In a moment the three of them had Jinny on the old stool, the noose around her neck, the rope harsh against her tender throat. Pressed close about her like ugly, waiting shadows, they held her so she could not move—could only tremble uncontrollably.

"You're going to kill me," she said, looking down at them, her eyes enormous in her small white face. "You want me out of the way. So you're going to kill me. And you killed Alice, too. I can see it in your faces."

"Yes, you tiresome child," Marion answered. "I put a sedative in her coffee before she went for a swim. But we're not going to kill you, child. You're going to kill yourself. You're moody, inclined to suicide. Last night you had a nightmare. Today you went wandering, found this old house, found the rope, tied it to an old hook

in the ceiling, and you acted out your dream. You killed yourself. We should have watched you, but you slipped away from us, and in a fit of melancholy you killed yourself.

"Dick, take away the stool. Bert, lower her gently. This must look natural. Let her grab the rope to support herself—her hands should be abraded—and grabbing the rope would be the instinctive thing to do. She'll tire soon enough."

Dick took away the stool. Bert lowered Jinny and then let go of her. Jinny hung there, her small hands clutching at the rope in an attempt to support her weight, but the hemp cut deeper and deeper into her throat. Slowly, her body turned about, throwing crazy shadows on the wall as a final shaft of sunlight broke into the room and as her breath choked in her throat.

"All right, put the stool back."

But it was not a Farrington who spoke. It was Mr. Downey, who stood in the doorway with a shotgun in his hand. Beside him was Sheriff Lamb, a large, silent man who seldom spoke, but whose expression now conveyed displeasure.

"Put it back, I said!"

Little Mr. Downey's voice sounded like a trap snapping shut. Bert put the stool back beneath Jinny's feet. Jinny stood very straight and with steady fingers loosened the noose. Then she stepped down.

"For a frightened moment," she said, "I almost thought you weren't coming, Mr. Downey." She no longer sounded like a child.

"Oh, we were there," Mr. Downey said. "Right on the dot, just like you said. But what took us a little longer, we were listening at the window and we had to come around to the door so you wouldn't be between them and us."

Jinny looked coldly at the three Farringtons, who were like grotesque shadows frozen in the act of trying to move.

"You killed Alice," she said. "I knew all along you must have killed Alice. I loved her, but she was dull and plain and nobody would marry her, I knew, except for her money. So I promised myself I'd get you somehow. Since you'd killed her in a foreign country, the only way I could get you was by making you try to kill me—before witnesses.

"It was risky. Sure it was. But I studied psychology in college and Mr. Downey is a cracker-jack private detective, and I thought I could do it, one way or another. I pretended to have dreams so you'd think I was a real nervous kid. Last night when you were

willing to let me eat poisonous mushrooms, I knew I'd better do something. So I tried putting this hanging idea into your heads. I didn't want you to try to drown me or push me off a cliff—I might not have been able to stop you if you'd done that. Well, it worked out as I hoped it would. You were so gullible, so easy to lead around. You should have seen your faces when I spilled that dish of mushrooms on the floor. Of course the ones I'd eaten were the harmless ones."

But she did not laugh at the memory. She only turned to Mr. Downey and Chief Lamb.

"Take them away, please," she said.

The Farringtons went, followed by the two men with shotguns. Last of all came Jinny Wells. Behind her the noose, stirred by the air currents, twisted and curled.

As was mentioned earlier, the Farringtons were a rather attractive family, if you don't mind overlooking a few bad habits.

But Jinny Wells was one individual who apparently did.

Finger Man

by Jack Ritchie

He said that I could call him Fred.

Now, as I drove through the flat desert country, we listened to the local news-caster announce:

"Hannibal Coggins, mass murderer of the 1960's, escaped from the state prison farm early this afternoon. He disappeared shortly after the noon roll call. Coggins is considered to be extremely dangerous."

I turned down the volume of the car radio slightly. "They didn't give a description of Coggins."

Fred nodded. "I suppose because it might do more harm than good. People would get all excited and turn in dozens of innocent citizens. It's probably enough that the police know what he looks like."

"I remember the case," I said. "Coggins went on a shooting spree and killed eleven people."

"Twelve," Fred said. "One afternoon he got into an argument with his neighbor about a property line and in due course he shot him. Then, feeling that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, he strolled about the neighborhood shoot-

ing people he disliked. He got twelve, including a dentist and a used-car salesman."

"Obviously he wasn't hanged."

"No. The governor at that time apparently had strong feelings about capital punishment. He commuted the sentence."

The radio began playing country western music.

"How far is it to the nearest gas station?" Fred asked.

I glanced at the map on the seat beside me. "About five miles more to Everettville. Where did you say you ran out of gas? I didn't see your car."

"It happened on one of those little side roads. Had to walk more than two miles before I got to the highway."

When I picked up Fred, he had been standing at the side of the road carrying a two gallon gasoline can and waving an entreating thumb. Ordinarily I might have passed him by, but he wore a business suit and in this desert country where the traffic is sparse one hesitates to pass people in distress miles and miles from the nearest habitation.

"What line of work are you in?" I asked.

"Haberdashery," Fred said. Then he smiled faintly. "But that's getting to be an old fashioned word. I own a men's clothing store back in Santa Fe. Was driving west to visit my daughter when I ran out of gas."

I glanced at Fred. His suit seemed to be of a good quality, but I couldn't admire the tailoring of the jacket. The back of the collar gaped away from the neck.

Fred patted his armrest. "Nice car. Chevy, isn't it?"

I nodded and then corrected myself. "No. A Ford. My last car was a Chevy. I keep getting the two mixed up."

Far ahead of us, a small cluster of houses came into view. They grew bigger as we approached, and finally we passed a sign that read EVERETTville, POP. 278.

Half a dozen cars were parked in front of what appeared to be the town's only cafe.

I glanced at my watch. "Nearly six. Frankly, I could use a bite to eat."

Fred nodded quickly. "Sounds like a pretty good idea to me."

I pulled into the parking area, and Fred and I entered the cafe.

It seemed to be fairly well filled with patrons. The three booths were all occupied and only two stools, side by side,

appeared to be open at the counter.

A law officer, apparently a sheriff, sat at the far end of the counter eating his supper. He was a somewhat paunchy middle-aged man wearing sunglasses. He also came equipped with a wide-brimmed white hat and a service revolver on a belt generously studded with cartridges.

Fred and I took the two vacant stools and studied the typewritten menu cards.

Fred looked up at the wall clock. "Excuse me, I think I'd better phone my daughter and explain why I'll be late. Save my stool." He went to the phone booth at the end of the room.

His back was turned toward me, but as I watched him I thought I saw him writing something on the margin of the telephone book.

I studied him for another few seconds and then pulled a paper napkin from its holder. Using my ballpoint pen, I wrote:

Hannibal Coggins, the escaped killer, is sitting next to me at this counter. He is dangerous and probably armed and will not hesitate to kill.

I folded the napkin into a tight wad and rose. I walked past the telephone booth to the

jukebox, ostensibly to study the list of records.

Almost at my elbow, the sheriff transported a forkful of mashed potatoes to his mouth.

I glanced at the phone booth again. Fred seemed to be still busy, but was he somehow watching me?

As unobtrusively as possible, I flipped the wadded napkin over the sheriff's shoulder. It bounced off the catsup bottle and came to rest in his saucer of peas.

I strode firmly back to my stool and picked up the menu.

Fred joined me in less than a minute. "Anything look good enough to eat?"

The sheriff appeared behind us. He tapped the shoulder of a burly individual on my right. "Are you Hannibal Coggins?"

"Not him," I whispered fiercely. "On my *other* side." I pointed to Fred.

Fred, in turn, pointed a finger at me. "Careful, sheriff, he's probably armed."

The sheriff's eyes went over both of us. Then he produced the note I'd written and read it aloud.

Fred's mouth gaped slightly.

The sheriff next read from a scrap of paper which had evidently been torn from a telephone book:

The man on the stool to my

right is Hannibal Coggins, who escaped from the state prison farm today. He's a mass killer and extremely dangerous.

I smiled tightly. "Quick thinking, Fred, but *my* note takes precedence."

Fred reached for his back pocket, but stopped when the sheriff's hand went to the butt of his gun.

"My name is Fred Stevens," Fred said stiffly. "I'm from Santa Fe. I've got *full* identification."

"Of course," I said dryly. "And out there in the desert lies the body of a man without a wallet or a suit of clothes." I indicated Fred's collar. "Would a man who claims he owns a haberdashery wear a suit that bulges so badly at the collar? It's little things like that which trip up the criminal."

Fred's voice rose. "I've got square shoulders and it's pretty hard to find a ready-made suit that fits square shoulders." He turned on me. "And what about *you*? You were driving a Ford, but you thought it was a Chevy until you took another look at the nameplate. Speaking of bodies in the desert, there's probably somebody lying out there who used to own a Ford."

The sheriff studied us and then rubbed his jaw. "I don't have any mug shots of Hanni-

bal Coggins yet. The state police will probably get around to sending me some in a couple of days."

Fred blinked. "But surely you must have a *description* of Hannibal Coggins?"

"Well, yes. But it's pretty general and could fit either one of you, or half a dozen people in town. Suppose I just put *both* of you behind bars until I find out which one is the real Hannibal Coggins?"

Fred protested. "On what *specific* charge do you think you could arrest *both* of us?"

"Litterbugging," the sheriff said. "You two been throwing wads of paper around, and that can play hob with the ecology." He put a hand on the butt of his revolver again. "Now stand up and turn around."

We did as we were told.

He found no weapons.

"Fine," he said. "Turn around and march out the door. The jail is right next to Harry's Bar." It was a short, though dusty, thirty-second walk to the adobe jailhouse. Inside, it was nicely cool. The small building consisted only of an area for the sheriff's desk and filing cabinet and two unoccupied cells.

The sheriff put one of us in each of the cells.

"What do you intend to do now?" Fred demanded. "Wait for the mail?"

"No," the sheriff said. "The simplest thing to do is for me to drive up to Phoenix and have a look at Hannibal Coggins' picture." He picked up the phone, dialed, and got somebody named Jim. He told Jim to come over to the jailhouse.

Jim appeared within ten minutes. He was a thin man in his middle twenties, thoroughly Adam's-appled, and with the usual suntan that ended abruptly at the hatline.

"My deputy," the sheriff explained. He handed Jim a badge and then turned back to us. "I'd like to take your fingerprints along to Phoenix."

Fred and I both protested, but our prints were taken.

After the sheriff left for Phoenix, Jim sat down at the desk and picked up a true detective magazine. He turned through it, found something interesting, and began reading, his lips moving slowly.

Fred went to the bars of his cell. "How long will it take the sheriff to get to Phoenix?"

"Two hours there and two hours back," Jim said.

Fred watched him read for a while. "So you're the deputy?"

Jim nodded. "Part-time—whenever I'm needed. Otherwise I work at Bud's Garage."

"How much does deputizing pay?"

"Three fifteen an hour. And

when I get in six months' time—that's nine hundred and sixty hours—I become eligible for health insurance."

"How many hours do you have in now?"

"Exactly six hundred twenty-three. Took me five years of part-time to accumulate that."

Fred reached for his wallet and pulled out a number of bills. "There's five hundred dollars in this roll." He folded the bills and tossed them out of his cell. "Well, well, deputy, look what dropped out of your pocket."

Jim frowned and shook his head. "No, sirree. We'll have none of that hanky-panky while I'm on duty."

He got a broom and pushed the money back to the cell bars. "It might be more polite to hand it back to you personally, but we're not supposed to even touch the prisoners' money."

I lay down on my bunk. After a while I groaned slightly.

The deputy looked my way. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"I have a terrible pain in my side," I said. I groaned again.

The deputy scratched his ear. "If it's appendicitis, there's nothing much I can do except phone the doctor. Only we don't have any here in town. I'd have to get Red Rock."

"I'm positive it isn't appendicitis," I said. "But perhaps

you could bring me a glass of water and a couple of aspirin?"

The deputy found some aspirin in the desk drawer and drew a paper cup of water from the water cooler.

He put the cup and the aspirin on the end of a narrow board and shoved it through the bars toward me.

"I'm not allowed to go in there," he explained. "Especially when I'm alone. You can never tell what might happen."

I swallowed the aspirin, drank the water, and lay down again.

In the next cell, Fred chuckled. "Nice try."

I turned on him indignantly. "I don't know what you're talking about. I get this stitch in my side during moments of stress." After a while, I dozed off.

The ring of the telephone woke me. The deputy reached for the phone and listened. Finally he hung up and smiled in our direction. "That was the sheriff calling from Phoenix. Seems as soon as he got there he found out that the real Hannibal Coggins was just picked up in Stafford. I guess we owe you two an apology."

He rose, got the ring of keys, and released both Fred and me.

I was a bit embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Fred, but I could have sworn you were Coggins."

Fred nodded. "I felt exactly

the same way about you." He sighed. "Well, I guess I'll get my gas can filled."

The deputy consulted his watch. "It's eight thirty. Bud's Garage stays open until nine."

Fred and I went back to my car, still parked at the cafe, and he picked up his gas can. "Maybe I can get somebody at Bud's Garage to drive me back to my car."

I felt that possibly I owed Fred something. "I'll drive you back. I really don't have anything important to do at this time of the night anyway."

We got gas at Bud's Garage and then headed back in the direction we had come. It was a rather beautiful night, with a full moon and a clear sky.

I drove nearly ten miles before Fred directed me to turn off onto an ungraveled side road. I had to slow down considerably to negotiate the rough surface.

"There's one thing I don't understand, Fred," I said. "If you aren't Hannibal Coggins, why did you try to bribe your way out of jail? Wouldn't it have been simpler—and cheaper—just to wait until the sheriff proved that you weren't Coggins?"

Fred sighed. "I was afraid you'd think of that. And if you work on it a little more, you'll probably come up with the answer." He pressed open the glove

compartment of my car and began rummaging around.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said, "but almost anything will do." He found a screwdriver. "If the sheriff had processed my fingerprints in Phoenix, he would have discovered that Hannibal Coggins isn't the only person in the world who's wanted by the police." He regarded me severely. "Ever been stabbed by a screwdriver?"

"No," I said uneasily. "I can't say that I have." I experienced the familiar tension stitch in my side and winced.

"Relax," Fred said. "Killing isn't my trade. That's why I went through the trouble of turning in what I thought was Hannibal Coggins. I thought that way I might be saving some innocent people's lives."

I felt a certain amount of relief.

He hefted the screwdriver again. "Just the same, remember that this weapon puts me in charge of the situation."

Some two hundred yards ahead of us I could make out the shadowy bulk of a car parked slightly to one side of the narrow road.

Fred gave an order. "Stop the car right here."

I put my foot on the brake. The car swerved to the right as

we came to an abrupt stop and Fred fell over me.

He quickly untangled himself: "Now, watch that! You could have gotten yourself killed if it were anybody else but me."

"I'm sorry," I said, "but the car swerves when I step on the brakes. I think one of the front tires is soft."

Fred took my car keys out of the ignition and pocketed them. "I'll leave the keys in the road when I leave. Now just sit right there and don't move until I'm gone."

Obviously Fred didn't want me to get close enough to his car to copy the license number.

He picked up the road map on the seat next to me and pocketed that too. "I wouldn't want to get lost again." He opened the car door and left with the two gallon can of gasoline, glancing back occasionally as he made his way to the shadows of his car. After a while his lights went on and the car pulled away.

I watched the taillights diminish in the distance and then got out of my car and walked down the road.

In the bright moonlight I had no trouble finding my car keys where Fred had said they would be.

I looked once more at the fading taillights and then made my way back to the car.

Poor Fred, I thought, he's heading for Nelson's Butte.

With the two gallons in his tank, he should be able to get there and a little beyond—or a little back—depending on his decision. That was all, however.

On the map there is an asterisk next to Nelson's Butte. Yet so many people, it seems, cannot find the footnotes on a map, and evidently Fred was one of them. Nelson's Butte is a ghost town and not a soul has lived there in over seventy years. Fred wouldn't find any gas stations there, and the nearest live town was more than forty miles farther on.

I started my car, carefully negotiated a turn, and drove back to the highway.

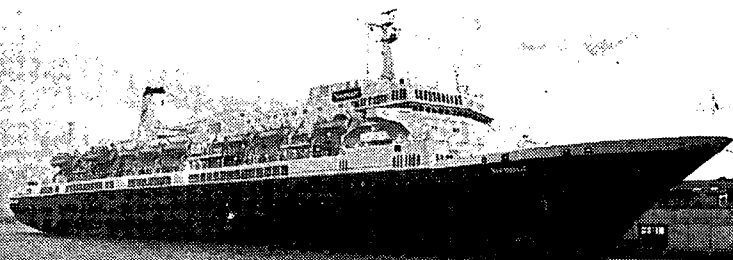
If I'd been an honest citizen, I would have driven back to Everettville and told the deputy approximately where he could pick up Fred.

However, I wasn't an honest citizen.

I, too, have my trade and I ply it well. When I had stepped on the brakes at Fred's order, I had turned the steering wheel slightly so that he would fall against me.

Now I patted the side pocket in which I had Fred's wallet. It contained at least five hundred dollars.

Not bad for one night's work.



**Don't Miss Out on the Second Annual
Davis Mystery Magazines' Mystery
Cruise '90 February 10 to 17, 1990
Aboard Holland America Cruise Line's
Fabulous Luxury Liner M.S. Noordam**

There's no mystery about the best way to experience seven sun-and-fun-filled days in the Caribbean. Enjoy the wonderful ports of San Juan, Puerto Rico; Tortola, British Virgin Islands; St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands; and Nassau, the Bahamas, all while sailing aboard one of the finest cruise ships afloat.

The best way to enjoy a mystery is to be a part of one! There will be crimes to solve, trivia contests, movie classics, great prizes, gifts, parties, and surprises galore.

We are pleased to announce that our two Edgar Award winning authors will be Ed Hoch and Bill Crenshaw. You will have an opportunity to meet both of these special guests and hear them speak about the "art of writing mysteries."

Book Early. Space Is Limited.

Prices for the mystery cruise include round-trip air fare and start at only
\$1279.00

per person, *double occupancy from two major cities*. There is limited availability in some accommodation categories. First come, first served.

To be part of this fabulous week and to receive all the special amenities, you must book your cruise through:

OMNI GROUP CRUISES, INC.

6513 Hollywood Boulevard, Hollywood, CA 90028

Write or call for more information (800) 876-OMNI

Please send me more information about Mystery Cruise '90

Name _____

(Please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone () _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Barbarossa and Company

by Kathryn Gottlieb

On the last Monday in hot and gritty August, I found myself marooned, to all intents and purposes, on the island of Manhattan. In my pockets were my flight ticket back to Geneva, an ancient address book, and not much else. I hadn't expected to stay more than a day. When I finally did get away, my pockets were bulging, my heart subverted, and my mind reeling.

Had she? Hadn't she? Had I aided and abetted? As to what happened, some will consider me an opportunist and some something worse, but—outside of the White House, or should I say Washington?—where are the moralists? The moral, of course, are everywhere.

The deal that had me hanging involved, as usual, surplus electronic equipment of the kind used by the military all over the world. Three years ago I opened an office in Geneva, for those reasons correctly associated in the public mind with conducting a business from there rather than, say, Cleveland, Ohio. I signed my first contract there on my twenty-ninth birthday, and it is my recollection that I fully expected to be a millionaire at thirty. That didn't happen—but one never knows, of course, about the future. Contrary to what Max told Anna, I am not a gun runner, and when I denied it, I told the truth. I do, however, sell equipment to governments you and I wouldn't vote for. But then, so does the U.S. government, so I make no apologies.

I had flown into New York that morning to wind up a business deal, but nothing was right and nothing was ready. Contracts and equipment were promised again, this time for the thirtieth, and I was left with a week to kill. Cash was low and nothing urgent called me back so I decided to wait it out. There was one stroke of luck—my old friend Hal Pierce handed me the key to his apartment. Hal's quarters occupy the front half of a reamed-out brownstone. You know the kind of place—bare brick walls, dying house plants, chrome, glass, last week's bread crumbs. The usual. Why do they do it? Why can't they at least leave the plaster on the walls?

Hal was on vacation, headed for Cape Cod. As soon as he took off I got busy with the telephone.

Two years can make a difference. Hedi Blume now had an unlisted phone, and so did Mary Bell. John Fischer, whose gallery handles paintings for me, was in Canada. George Becker's British secretary informed me in cutting tones that Mr. Becker was at the Vineyard. Toni Warren (female) didn't answer. Tony Marano (male) didn't answer. The whole world was out of town. Aggrieved, I walked out into the afternoon glare and into a place called Volstead's Retreat—it's a *cute* neighborhood—and picked up a bottle.

I was putting my change away when my eyes hit on a display of fine Holland gin—Bols Genever, in its brown earthen crocks—and I remembered Max Klinck.

There *was* someone to talk to after all.

Max is an incunabulist—for those of you not in the trade, a dealer in rare books and manuscripts. He is a towering, red-bearded Dutchman with blazing blue eyes and a wooden leg of the best bird's-eye maple—which is, he assures me, much handsomer than the other. Max was a war casualty after the war ended. One day while playing with other children on the sandy beach of Oostmahom on the North Sea, he had the misfortune to trigger off a buried land mine. He was eight or nine at the time.

I find Max a genial man with no illusions about the world—it's a bad place, he says, and he's lucky to be in it. I was first introduced to him a couple of years ago in John Fischer's gallery on one of his rare ventures away from East 74th Street, where, in the ordinary course of work, he handles some of the rarest and most beautiful books in the world. I can imagine, perhaps foolishly, no more satisfying life.

Max is clumsy on his crutches, and attracts every eye. It is no pleasure for him to go out in the world and he rarely leaves his desk. And that, at the end of a fast hot walk up Lexington Avenue, is where I found him—but only after a brief and curious episode which barely caught my attention at the time.

Reaching 74th Street, I paused in front of Max's establishment to mop my forehead and collect myself for a moment before going in. The place is, like Hal's, an old brownstone, but its antique and rotting splendor has so far escaped improvement. Max calls himself, for business purposes, "Barbarossa"—the name had been fixed beside the doorway in small bronze letters. I was taken aback a little to see that the letters had gone and in their place was a sign

that said "Barbarossa and Company." I shook my head. Was Max about to vanish too?

I was frowning at the words when the heavy door at the top of the steps flew open and a small man hurried down to the sidewalk. I'd have paid no attention to him if he hadn't paid attention to me, attempting, as he brushed past, to conceal his face with a sudden, awkward lift of his hand.

I looked after him, curious. A little past middle age, heavy-featured, expensively tailored, vaguely familiar: not someone known to me, but someone well known. The name escaped me. No matter. What mattered was if Max was in.

I climbed the stairs, rang, and was admitted. The first floor is devoted to the sale of fine and rare books, and is presided over by staff. Max's private domain, where treasures change hands, is up a flight of stairs. One of the first floor flunkies rang ahead to announce my name and unlocked an iron gate toward the rear of the place. I mounted the mahogany-railed flight into Max's worm-eaten paradise and there he was, behind his desk, beaming, bellowing a welcome, his eyes sparkling, the same old Max.

"Sit! Sit!" he commanded, and I did, first gazing all around with remembered pleasure. A fine place to work, of handsome proportions, dark paneled, shelved all around, smelling of leather and ancient paper and noble dust.

"Max, I envy you."

He grinned at me. "Don't be a damn fool. You're fine?"

"I'm fine. You?"

He nodded, reached behind his chair, took from a shelf a crock of Holland gin and two ruby tumblers, and filled them. I took my glass and he took his. "Now," he said, "tell me everything."

What was he—friend? acquaintance?—I was never sure. In any category, good company. But, for all the surface sparkle, the wit and gratifying curiosity, Max runs deep, and I have never known what Max was thinking.

We talked through several refills: about my business, some gossip—what else can I call it?—about mutual friends. He described to me, in a tone of cordial condescension, some of the peculiar treasures that had lately come into his hands. Max says that I am illiterate, and by his standards that's so. And then I remembered.

"Barbarossa and Company," I said. "What's that all about?"

"Ah! I have a partner. Wait, wait till you meet her. You will say I am the luckiest fellow in the world."

Directly behind Max's desk is a wall of the controlled-atmosphere room that serves as vault and workroom, where his earliest and most fragile wares are stored. Max swung around in his chair and directed a shout at the wall. "Anna!" And again, a good bellow, "Anna!" There was silence for a moment, then the door to the strongroom swung open and Max's new partner stepped into the room.

She smiled at me. Yes, a beautiful woman. "Anneke. This is Peter Hessberg, whom I have not seen for two years. Anna Eykert." She took a step forward and extended her hand to me, a good square hand. I grasped it.

Another tumbler appeared. Anna sat and we had gin all around. There was chitchat, and then Max said, "Peter has a most interesting profession."

"Oh?"

"He is a gun runner."

Anna's eyes looked into mine. "Listen to him! Is that true?" Her voice was round and clear, with an undertone of amusement. The cadences were foreign.

"No."

She shook her head. "I thought not. Max is a terrible liar. A terrible liar." She looked at him fondly. A little unwarranted pang of jealousy pinched off my smile. Why was I jealous—what was Anna to me? Is there such a thing as jealousy at first sight?

Max was speaking. "Indeed a small world. Anna grew up in my own little village by the North Sea."

"It is called Oostmahom," said Anna. "Have you heard of it?"

"He has heard of it from me," said Max. "Peter is the only man in America who has heard of Oostmahom."

We talked on, of inconsequential things, while I stared at the woman from Oostmahom. She conformed to no conception of beauty that I consciously carried around with me, but she was beautiful just the same: a good body of the sturdy kind; a broad and well modeled face; long, heavy-lidded blue eyes under straight brows; and a marvelously shaped mouth. When she spoke, I couldn't look away. Her hair was very fair, very thick, cut short—very Dutch. I told myself that she was stocky, square-jawed, and too old for me. My age, at least. And, of course, she belonged to Max, who said, "You're looking thoughtful."

I shrugged.

Anna asked me if I made my home in New York.

"Geneva."

She raised her eyebrows. "Such an elderly city! Are you happy there? It is so cold. So grey! And the people—nobody speaks!"

"Money speaks," said Max.

"Ah, that's dreadful," said Anna. "It is rude. Don't pay any attention to him, Mr. Hessberg. He has no humor. No funniness. He lacks good qualities."

"Peter sometimes deals in paintings," said Max. She shot him a look—startled, I thought—which he did not return. "Tell Anna about your business. It is interesting."

The units I purchase from the U.S. military I ship to Amsterdam to my friend Piet Bonta at P. Bonta Electrische, N.V., where they are tested, rebuilt, and shipped out to my clients—in most cases, the so-called third-world governments, who pay me a long time after with first-world money. All this I described, briefly, for Anna's benefit, omitting the problems.

When I finished, she said, "I think Max is right. You are a gun runner. I see no difference. One of those terrible people who keep the world in a ferment."

"You might not approve of my customers, but they're legitimate governments, all of them. I don't deal with terrorist organizations."

Max raised his coppery eyebrows. "All governments are terrorist organizations."

"Don't be childish," said Anna, laughing.

"It's true," said Max. "Someday you will agree with me. Now, Peter, tell Anna about the paintings."

From time to time business takes me to Africa; the new nations—uncomfortable places, but they fascinate me. In the last couple of years paintings, along with other heirlooms, have begun to surface; pathetic, abandoned collections, once the property of families established for generations in colonial Africa. Those families are gone; most left empty-handed, the victims of upheaval. Some of the paintings belonged to the dead. Most are the sort of thing you couldn't give away just a few years back: landscapes, genre—nineteenth century, most of them, modest, agreeable works. Today there's a market for them. What comes my way I ship to New York, to John Fischer's gallery.

Anna listened to me, frowning. "I think it is sad," she said.

Max, on the other hand, looked pleased. "I think Providence has sent our friend here today."

"No. No, Max. I know what you are thinking."

"He has a whole week to waste. Surely he doesn't want to spend it in this grimy city!"

"Then let him spend it in Timbuktu. Oh, Max—" she clasped her hands—"I am not happy about this!"

"What are you talking about?" I asked them.

Max leaned forward, his powerful arms resting on the polished surface of his admirable desk. "I have promised to pick up a painting in Amsterdam and bring it back here this week. Nothing out of the ordinary—a little nineteenth century landscape, the kind of thing you have just been describing.

"I am doing this as a favor for a client who is important to me. He has formed a sentimental attachment to this painting—and he must have it at once." Max laughed shortly. "I can tell you, he is a man who is accustomed to getting what he wants. So, I have very foolishly undertaken to pick it up for him myself. Peter, I don't want to go. I don't know when I was last out of the city. Or *in* the city." He nodded in the direction of the crutches propped against the wall behind his desk. "I totter through the streets like a falling building. Heads turn."

"Can't Anna—"

"I need her here. Listen to me, Peter. New York in August is an abomination. You don't want to stay here. I will pay you a nice fee—let's say ten percent of the selling price—and all expenses, of course. You'll pick up the painting from the dealer, a man named Gerrit Till. He is ten, twelve miles outside the city, that's all. And you'll bring it here."

"What kind of money are we talking about?"

He grimaced. "I am almost ashamed to tell you. My selling price is twenty thousand dollars. As you will see, too much money for this little painting. For your share? Two thousand."

"Do you mind telling me how much you're paying for it?"

"Not at all. After all, you will pay the dealer for us. Two thousand dollars, that's all. In cash. It's worth a little more to him that way."

"Is the buyer that fellow who was leaving when I got here?"

Anna's eyes widened. "What?"

Max shook his head. "No, no. You would not know this man, you have not seen him here. Who it is doesn't matter. What do you say?"

"What's the catch?"

"None." His gaze was a model of candor. "This is not a painting

that the Netherlands Historical Commission is interested in. There are no restrictions against its sale or export. I promise you there is nothing to worry about. If I could move around more easily I'd go myself. And I'll tell you the truth—Anna had a little run-in with the commission a few years ago. So I prefer not to send her. Why stir up old complications?"

A plausible tale. Did I believe it?

Again Anna glanced at him and for some moments their eyes carried on a mutual discussion. Then she said, almost whispering, "I have a bad feeling about this."

"Anneke, my love. This is nonsense!"

Anneke-my-love shook her head, and the fine fair hair flew back and forth. "No."

"You'll do it?" Max asked me.

Anna's blue eyes held mine, willing me to refuse.

"I'll do it."

It was agreed I would go on Wednesday, as the painting wouldn't be ready before then. Max said there had been a little damage to a corner of the landscape—no more than a square inch was involved—and Gerrit Till, the dealer, who was fortunately an expert in restoration, was doing the necessary patch-up. I was not to be concerned—the buyer was aware of the state of the canvas.

"Gerrit's a fine fellow," Max told me. "Interesting, too. An Indonesian background. A good contact for you. Maybe someday you'll do business with him yourself—who knows?"

Anna left with me. It had begun to rain, bringing up a strong smell of wet stone and city dust from the sidewalks.

The afternoon had grown prematurely dark. Here and there the lights of store windows were reflected on the pavement; the city looked cosy and glistening. I walked beside Anna for a block or two toward the East River. She seemed distracted and had nothing to say. She disliked me, I thought, or distrusted me. I stopped under a street lamp at the corner of Third Avenue and put a hand on her arm. "Why don't you want me to go?"

She shrugged. "Max knows that I would be glad to do it, but he says I mustn't. He is stubborn, something terrible. It's a waste of money to send you, that's all."

"That's not the only reason. I think I ought to know."

"I've told you, there's nothing else. Now if you don't mind, I'll go along without you."



THERE WAS NO REASON TO CONCEAL THE FACT THAT I WAS IN AMSTERDAM. EVERYTHING WAS ON THE UP AND UP.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why should I mind?" In the harsh light of the street lamp she looked a little older than she had in Max's softly-lit domain, but only by an hour or two. Max's property.

I bent my head and kissed her forehead. I said, "I'll bet you were a beautiful woman."

"I *am* a beautiful woman," said Anna serenely. She patted my arm and walked off down the street.

Forty-eight hours later I turned the key in the door of my apartment in Amsterdam and threw open the windows to the familiar maritime air. For the past two years I've rented the ground floor of a skinny old house on Verimus Straat that belongs to a youngish widow who lives on the upper floors. We maintain a pleasant, if formal, relationship. Our paths cross occasionally in the little entrance hall we share, and when they do we talk about the weather. My part of the house consists of a sunny, bow-windowed front room that serves me as office and sitting room and a small bedroom opening off it. At the very back there's a tiny kitchen, and at the back of that a window looks out over a walled garden. A narrow road, little used, runs past the end of the garden, and beyond lies a stretch of low, open land—whence the sea-tasting breezes. I have no staff working for me there, but I keep duplicates of the files on current contracts. It's a useful, peaceful place, and quite handy to Piet Bonta's factory.

I slept until mid-afternoon, then I drove out in the direction of the coast along the road that took me to Ihmuiden, turning off to the north, as instructed, just past the ISOL Works on a potholed road through land that appeared unstable and was surely empty. Over my head a pewter sky hung heavy, wide, and unsupported—there appeared to be nothing to keep it from moving downward in a swift, enveloping motion. I told myself not to be fanciful. I had been under a lot of grey Dutch skies and none had ever fallen on my head.

Still, land and weather were oppressive, and my worries returned. I asked myself why they had sent me here and why I'd been fool enough to come. Besides the cash, of course. It must be very nice to be rich and not have to do foolish things for money.

Five miles beyond the turnoff I came to a cluster of little houses, then emptiness again, and then, alone in the fields, Gerrit Till's house, a small, ill-proportioned place too tall for its base, standing in a stretch of empty fenland. I pulled to the side of the road and

got out of the car. The place was dead quiet except for the whine of the wind in the wires over my head. What a place to live! I crossed the road, climbed the steps, and rang the bell.

Gerrit Till opened the door and I recalled Max's reference to an Indonesian background. Dark Oriental eyes, sparkling with welcome, looked out at me from a round Dutch face, surmounted by a thatch of fair and greying hair.

"I'm Peter Hessberg."

"Of course! I am expecting you. Come in!" His voice was deep, his English, like Anna's, without accent but European in its cadences. He showed me into a room jammed with books and papers and heavy Dutch furniture. There was a smell of turpentine in the air. Business, said Gerrit Till, could wait a moment. First we must have a drink together—and he poured the inevitable portions of Genever. I accepted mine, smiling, very much at my ease—I found him charming, likeable.

He was talkative. How were Max and Anna? What did I think of the art market? Did I know there was quite a market suddenly in the paintings of Albert Boertson? Very odd. What did I think, was there any merit in them? It was so very good of me to come. He hoped I had had a pleasant journey. We talked, we drank. "Now," he said, "if you will excuse me for a moment."

He went out through a door toward the rear of the room, shutting it behind him. There would be a kitchen back there, I supposed—the usual layout. I realized with surprise that we were not alone in the house. I heard his voice, at least I supposed it to be his—just a murmur through the heavy door—and then a woman laughed, and I thought I heard her say *es niet stom, es niet stom!*—don't be silly!—and then a man's voice, his, no doubt, the words indistinguishable.

A moment later he came back into the room. The painting was under his arm. He placed it across the arms of a chair and stooped to look at it, grunting.

"I'm getting to be an old man, with old complaints," he said with a laugh. "Would you believe it? I had a letter today from my mother, who is in Soerabaya. She worries and she scolds me—she thinks I am a boy still, a boy who does not take care of himself. She is very old now. I suppose I will always seem like a child to her. Well, come, let us examine this painting."

I moved to his side.

"It's nice, isn't it?"

I nodded. It was very nice. An ordinary, pleasant landscape, sentimental in the way of the past century, and somehow very attractive. A quiet scene—blue sky, broken clouds above a broad valley, and in the foreground a wide-branched oak and a cow placidly cropping grass.

"Behold the cow," said Gerrit Till. "I cannot look at her without wanting to sleep. All summer afternoon is in that cow."

I agreed, laughing. "It's very well done."

"You realize that there is a little patch in the corner. Max knows about this, of course."

"He told me you had had to do some work on it."

"Can you smell it? Poof!" He wrinkled his nose. "You do not mind the smell of turpentine?"

"No, I don't mind it."

"It should vanish soon enough."

He then disappeared himself through the door at the rear, returning with paper and string, and proceeded to wrap the painting neatly. "Voilà!" he said. "She is ready to travel."

I was leaving when I remembered the money. He hadn't mentioned it. I dug it out of my pocket—a packet of American bills of mixed denominations—and handed it to him.

He took it, smiling.

I said, "It doesn't seem enough."

"That's true. It's worth a little more. Max, of course, will get more. But I owe Max some favors. This is fine. I am satisfied."

I drove back to Amsterdam. The weather hadn't improved, but my spirits were considerably higher. Why not, I thought, have dinner with Piet Bonta? There was no reason to conceal the fact that I was in Amsterdam. Everything was on the up-and-up.

Piet, as I mentioned earlier, is head of the plant that reprocesses most of the equipment I buy and sell. We met at seven at a place run by Pauli BenBroek on the Reguliergraat—nothing fancy, but you get good food there, and plenty of it. We talked for a while about this and that. Maia and the kids were fine, the problems were almost solved with the last shipment of battery chargers I had shipped over—an ordinary conversation. And then Piet, shaking the sauce bottle over his rice, said that he didn't know what the world was coming to. "You would think," he said, "that at least outside the city you would be safe in your own home. But now I don't know. Did you hear the radio?"

"I haven't had it on. What happened?"

"Some fellow was shot to death this afternoon right in his own home. A harmless old man, it sounds like. Perhaps not old—I don't remember."

"It's terrible, all right. Sounds like New York. Was it a robbery? You know," I said, waving a fork at him, pontificating my way through—had I known it—my last carefree moment, "the way to cut down on this sort of thing is to get rid of the fences. As I understand it, you can place your order for your favorite brand of TV or a yellow Toyota and they'll pick it up for you in twenty-four hours."

"This wasn't a TV," said Piet. "They think a picture was stolen."

I put my fork down. "A painting?"

"Yes. I think they said it was an oil painting. This fellow's body was found by a woman who comes late in the afternoon to cook his dinner and tidy up. It seems he was an art dealer. She had seen him working on a painting—touching up the frame, she thinks, or putting varnish on. Is that possible?"

"Yes."

"Well, whatever it was, she noticed him working on it yesterday afternoon. Nothing of great value, she says—a picture with a cow in it, ordinary stuff. But this woman says that today it's not there."

"Maybe he sold it."

"That could be. Or maybe some hoodlums who broke in looking for a color TV took the painting instead. God knows! In any case, the fellow was shot and he's dead. It's a terrible world when you're not safe in your own house."

"Where did this happen?"

"It was out along one of those roads in the direction of Ihmuiden. I'll tell you the truth, I never cared for the area myself. It's desolate. But people live there. There's no accounting for tastes."

I pushed my plate away.

"You're not hungry?"

I shook my head. "I had a late lunch."

"Oh."

"Did the radio say anything else?"

"About the killing? Oh yes, it was full of it. Let's see. An old lady who lives down the road, closer in to the city, told the police she saw a little blue car going down the road in the afternoon. She thinks it must have come from the dead man's house since no one lives beyond. A blue station wagon. Don't ask me how she saw it."

Maybe she has a telescope. Wonderful witnesses, old men and women. They sit all day in their parlor windows and witness." He made a wry face; the clear blue eyes caught mine for a moment with a look of amusement. "That's how we'll end our days, old friend. Witnesses."

"I wonder—"

"Yes?"

"Nothing. As you say, hoodlums out for a lark. Or a killing. Well. Have you finished?"

"Oh, yes." Piet patted his stomach. "No dessert. I promised Maia to take off five pounds. It's the only birthday present she wants. I'd rather give her a diamond necklace." He pushed back his chair. "Will I see you at the plant tomorrow morning?"

"I doubt it. Not this trip. I have business to do at the bank and then I'm due back in New York."

He looked at me thoughtfully. "All right. Let's go." He walked out with me to the cobbled road beside the canal and stood talking odds and ends of business, leaning with one arm braced against the hood of the car. Suddenly he paused, smiled, and said, "Aha! Here's a little blue station wagon right under my elbow! You didn't drive to Ihmuiden today, yourself?"

I smiled too. "Damned if I can remember. You'd better watch your fingerprints."

When he had covered a dozen yards in the direction of his own car he looked back and called to me, "Gerrit something. Do you know the name?"

I shook my head.

The painting seemed to be what it seemed to be. I examined it, my door locked, blinds drawn, for a quarter of an hour, tilting it this way and that, running my fingers over the surface. I remembered Gerrit Till's wiry body crouched down in front of the painting, his voice saying something about the cow and summer afternoons. Dead. I frowned at the painting. No one would have killed for it. I reminded myself that no one had. The proof of that was here in my hands. I had the painting, and I had paid for it fair and square. And yet, an odd-chance break-in? I didn't believe it. The police didn't believe it, either. They were looking for a blue station wagon.

I covered the picture with a blanket, stepped out into the hallway, and shouted up the unlit staircase. After a moment a light went on and Mevrouw Hendrix appeared on the landing above. She was

clutching an old bathrobe, a man's robe, about her. She looked apprehensive, a little absurd, and very pretty. "What's wrong?" she asked me.

"Nothing's wrong. I'm sorry to disturb you. Do you have a flashlight?"

"Has your electric gone off?"

"Nothing like that. I just want to look at something."

"I'll get it for you." She came down the stairs, crowded past me in the narrow hallway. I allowed myself to observe all those attributes to which in her case I normally closed my eyes—the fine-grained skin, the silky hair now falling over her shoulders, the desirable figure. I reminded myself that this was no time to abrogate, as they say at The Hague, my nonintervention policy. I heard her rattling things in the little pantry behind the stairs and then she was back with a square plastic flashlight which she put into my hands. After a considering glance which met my eyes, she climbed the stairs.

I waved the flashlight at her. "I'll bring this up to you later."

"No, thank you. When you are finished using it, put it on the stairs. I'll pick it up in the morning."

"But—"

"We have a perfect relationship," she said firmly. "Let's not tinker with it. We meet, we talk about the weather, we will go on that way."

"Tina—"

She closed the door.

The flashlight revealed what ordinary lamplight had failed to disclose, minute elevations and depressions in the clear blue patches of sky. It was the only anomaly I could find. The brushwork in the area should have been smooth, and it was, but something lay underneath. Gerrit would have been wiser to fill the sky with storm clouds—the busy brushwork would have concealed the brushstrokes underneath. But then, of course, the cow's afternoon would have been spoiled.

I spent a restless night, pacing through the little rooms, gazing alternately across the dark salt meadows at the back and out into the street, where foot traffic, none of it sober, went on through the night. I kept my windows locked, carried the steel-tipped roller of a window shade for a weapon, and knew myself for a fool. There was no longer any doubt in my mind that Gerrit Till's death was

connected with the painting, that Max and Anna had sent me there to avoid danger to themselves, and that the painting now resting under my mattress was a national treasure. I felt a strong urge to get rid of it—to dump it in the nearest canal—and the nearest canal wasn't far. But I can't drown a kitten and I can't drown a painting. Art lives.

Near dawn I dozed off in the armchair in the bay window, and when I awoke—don't ask me how the mind works—I knew the name of the man who had walked quickly and furtively out of Max's doorway. We have all seen his picture in the papers. Ambrose Voyt—multimillionaire, art collector, a man of unknown origins and manifest destiny.

Ambrose Voyt, it is said, buys nothing worth less than half a million. I looked at the time. It was half past five, and the house-fronts opposite were pink in the early light. I got to my feet, made myself a cup of coffee, drank it, tore the paper backing off the picture, studied it, killed time till the stores opened, went out, returned the car, wasn't arrested, came back on foot with packages, and said goodbye to the cow.

"Thank God you're back," said Max. "You are back, aren't you? Where are you calling from?"

"I'm back."

"I expected to see you two days ago. What happened?"

I told him I'd had a number of things to take care of.

"Do you have the painting with you?"

"Yes."

There was a sigh of relief. "It is charming, is it not?"

"Charming."

"You'll bring it right around?"

I said I was afraid I couldn't do that.

There was a throbbing silence, and then Max said, in a voice I hardly recognized, "What's wrong?"

I told him I thought perhaps there'd been a little misunderstanding and that I'd be there shortly to talk things over.

I let an hour go by and then walked uptown. Max nodded when I came into his presence and motioned me to a chair. He was pale, and—it may have been my imagination—his hair seemed to have lost its coppery gleam. Anna was there, composed and unsmiling. No one could be beautiful, I thought, who didn't look like Anna. Moments passed in a heavy silence and then Max spoke. "I hope

you're not going to tell me something has happened to that painting. It's not damaged?"

"No. Nothing like that."

"And you brought it back with you?" I nodded. "Good, then!" He forced a smile. "It's the money, is it? I'll give you your money and then you'll bring it here. How's that?"

I said nothing.

"Or perhaps you'd like us to pick it up. Anna will go back with you to wherever you are staying, and perhaps you would not mind to see her safely back here."

"It's not that simple."

Max stiffened and looked away—not at Anna, just away, then back. "Perhaps you will tell us what it is that is not simple."

"Our arrangement, Max. Ten percent—"

"Ah!" He smiled. "Perhaps I have been ungenerous. And of course we are very grateful. Shall we say fifteen? Although I must say I would not have expected this of you. After all, we made our bargain."

"Ten percent's fine. Ten percent of the selling price."

"Yes. As we agreed. Two thousand dollars."

"Forty."

"Oh!" said Anna.

"Explain yourself," said Max, in a voice of ice.

I settled back in my chair. "Let's have some schnapps, Max—then we can talk like civilized people. And you don't have to worry—I'm not going to tell you anything you don't already know."

Max reached for the bottle on the shelf behind him, not taking his eyes off me. Anna handed me a tumbler, staring at me from an immeasurable distance.

I waited until she was back in her chair. "Gerrit Till is dead."

Anna's hand flew to cover her mouth. Max looked wary.

"Murdered."

"No," said Anna. "Oh, please, no!" Her hand dropped to her lap. The dismay in her voice and in her eyes was real.

I felt a rush of anger. "Do you know that his mother is living? An old, old woman living out in the Indies somewhere? Her heart will be broken." I looked from one to the other of them. "It was a wicked thing to kill that man."

"Yes, it was," said Max. "Tell us what happened."

I described what the broadcast had said, in particular the statement of the housekeeper, who had found the body at about five

o'clock when she turned up to fix the murdered man's dinner. The morning newspaper had described her as grief-stricken.

"Oh, it's so sad," said Anna. "It's so sad."

I said, "You set me up, you two."

"What?" said Max. "What?"

"I've had plenty of time to think things out. You bought that painting for Ambrose Voyt—" Max's jaw tightened "—and I figure that makes it worth half a million. But I can't be sure, so let's say, at a conservative guess, four hundred thousand. All right? At a hundred percent markup you would have had to pay Gerrit Till two hundred thousand—a quarter of a million, maybe. The two thousand you gave me to hand him was to pacify me, not to pay him. He laughed when I gave it to him. Now I understand why."

"This is fascinating," said Max. "Here—let me fill your glass."

"No, thank you. You gave him his quarter million, waited for me to pick up the painting—which I so obligingly did for you—shot him, and took back your money. Ambrose Voyt's money."

"But why send you?" said Max. "Why didn't I do it all myself?" He smiled at me. "You're my good friend, Peter, but you're a crazy fellow, too."

"You sent me—" I groped for a reason "—to get the merchandise through customs. To be seen. I am known to be a dealer, after all, in a small way. To take the heat off, Max! Why do I have to tell you this? You know it better than I do. If they had picked me up, who would have believed I didn't kill him? I was there. My car was seen."

"This is nonsense." He poured himself a gin, drank it, and set the tumbler down with a sigh. "That's better. Look, this has all been a great shock, you know? Gerrit was a fine man. What has happened is terrible. And you—I am afraid you are suffering from an overwrought imagination. The painting is what it is, no more—a pretty little landscape—and it reminds Ambrose Voyt of the farming country where he was born—somewhere in Eastern Europe, I think. He's a sentimental man. The picture is worth twenty thousand to him, and half that to anyone else. Less. Everything else is fantasy."

I got to my feet.

Anna spoke. "Max and I have been here in the city the whole time you were gone. *The whole time.*" Her voice was earnest, and her eyes shining with the will to be believed.

I walked to the door at the head of the stairs.

"Where do I reach you?" Max's voice was calm, but I heard the turbulence underneath. It reminded me of the blue sky Gerrit Till had painted over the unknown work.

"I'll call you tomorrow after the banks are open," I said.

Max came thumping into Hal's apartment a little after half past ten in the morning. Anna was with him. I indicated the sofa. He handed Anna his crutches and they both sat down.

He gazed around the room as though he hadn't a thing on his mind. "This is your friend's apartment?"

I nodded. "It's hideous, isn't it?"

He looked at me for confirmation. "Who would do this to such a handsome old house?"

He turned to Anna.

"Oh, Max," she said faintly, "I don't want to talk about this."

But Max was himself again. His hair had regained its fire. "That painting over your chair, Peter. Behind your chair, should I say? Dreadful!"

I turned my head and squinted up at the painting: broad black slashes crossing a dead-white ground. Up and down, left and right. Zip-zap.

"A poor man's Kline," said Max. "And if I am not mistaken, a left-handed painter." He narrowed his eyes. "Who is it, Peter? Can you tell me?"

I obligingly swiveled around again. "'P.H.,' 'P.L.,' something like that."

"Peyell?" He shrugged. "It's not familiar."

"Please, Max," said Anna. "Can't we do what we came to do and get out of here?"

"Of course," said Max. "Peter, the painting."

"The money."

He brought out a sheaf of bills and placed them on the table beside the sofa. "Two thousand," he said. "We'll forget yesterday's nonsense."

"Forty."

"No," said Max. "I'm sorry Gerrit was killed. May I remind you, I have known him longer than you. And I'm sorry for his mother as well. She is a fine woman—no one should have to suffer so. But what happened has nothing to do with Anna or with me, nothing whatsoever. My dear friend, I must insist that you hand over the painting."

I shook my head.

"Oh, for God's sake!" Anna jumped to her feet. "Max will give you the money, the forty thousand. All you are asking. We deceived you about the value of the painting, that's true—but you wouldn't have brought it out if we hadn't, would you? You know you wouldn't! We had no intention to place you in jeopardy and we didn't! We didn't! The customs people didn't make any trouble, did they? What happened was a coincidence, a terrible coincidence! Unless—" a look of the remotest amusement crossed her face—"you didn't do something foolish, did you?"

That wasn't worth an answer and it didn't get one.

"Max—pay him. You promised me—you promised me."

"No," Max said. "He has not a shred of evidence. Of course—" he looked at me—"the blackmailer is in a position of power. Accusation is a powerful weapon, a bludgeon. I assure you I understand that. But I repeat—you have no evidence."

"Evidence can be gathered," I told him. "Let's say I start with the passenger lists of airlines flying into Schiphol on Tuesday."

"I doubt if they will be made available to you."

"The police will have no trouble getting hold of them."

"Max, I beg you. He is crazy. He will make endless trouble." Anna was staring at the floor, all color gone from her face.

Max looked at her for a long moment, a peculiar slanting look under half-lowered lids. "All right, Peter," he said in a toneless voice. "I agree to your terms. Let's have it."

"The money, if you don't mind."

He reached into a pocket, and this time the roll of bills was considerably thicker. He threw them onto the little table with a gesture of contempt, then put out a hand and fanned the money across the surface. He didn't remove his hand. "Don't touch it." There was no emotion in his voice, but a nerve jumped spasmodically under his eye. "I'll have the painting first. You are to understand that this is your commission at ten percent of approximate value. That is all it is. It is neither an admission nor a coverup. It is an adjustment of price and an abatement of a nuisance."

"Fine."

"Let's have it then." He placed himself between me and the table, unsteady on his feet but managing without the crutches, which Anna was holding with a white-knuckled grasp.

I turned away from them and lifted the poor man's Kline down from the wall.

"Oh," said Anna.

"That's it?"

"It's there. Under your landscape, where you buried it."

"If you have damaged it!" His eyes were bulging. "It is priceless!"

"If your landscape didn't do it any harm, then my small effort didn't hurt it either," I told him. He opened his mouth and shut it again. "Tell me," I went on, "how did you protect the painting when Gerrit painted over it? That is—*was*—his landscape?" I smiled at them. "Gone now, I'm afraid."

Anna's voice was vibrant with relief. "It's overpainted on a styrene wrap. Three-millimeter. It's a trick to get it to take the paint, of course. Gerrit knew what to do." At the mention of his name, she burst into tears.

I looked at Max. "What's under it?"

"You don't want to know," said Max. He took his crutches and they left without another word. Anna carried the painting.

I picked up the money from the table and went to the door to close it. Max and Anna were standing just inside the old fashioned vestibule. I saw Max shift his crutches, then reach out and brush the tears from Anna's cheeks with his strong, ruddy fingers. Then he leaned down and murmured something very low. Anna smiled. The heavy glass door muffled her words, but I heard the familiar rise and fall of her voice. "I'm all right," I think I heard her say. "Really, I'm all right."

They left.

I told myself I wasn't stealing, only demanding a fair return on a business deal. Nor was I concealing a crime. I had no shred of evidence in my possession, only a moral certainty; some words not clearly overheard and a theory that could indeed have fit the case and was quite possibly wrong. And Max, of course, had given me the money. I closed the door and turned back, a sour old man of thirty-two, wondering what the use of money was anyway.

I finished up my business in New York and flew back to Geneva.

I keep thinking of Anna, standing in the vestibule, crying. What if I'm wrong? Is it possible for a woman with such a broad, calm brow, such eyes, such lips, to murder a decent man—or any man—in cold blood, even for a substantial sum of money? I tell myself it isn't. And yet, there is Anna's trick of repeating her words, and the recollection of a voice, a murmur, behind a heavy door—someone saying to Gerrit Till, in the last hour of his life, *es niet stom*—don't be silly—and saying it again.




I'll be back in New York in October. I'll ask her to have dinner with me, just the two of us. We'll talk all evening, quite possibly all night, and Anna will tell me all I want to know.

But how much do I really want to know?

Maybe we'll just talk about the weather.

But I should know the truth, shouldn't I? The truth is an absolute good.

Es niet stom. I'd rather have Anna.

DID YOU MISS A KEY ISSUE?		BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE	
 <p>ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE</p> <p>LAST CHANCE TO UNLOCK MORE MYSTERIES IN ALFRED HITCHCOCK. CHECK OFF TODAY THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK BACK ISSUES THAT YOU'D LIKE, AND MAIL WITH YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER. ORDERS TAKEN ON FIRST-COME, FIRST-SERVED BASIS. HURRY! LIMITED SUPPLY AVAILABLE.</p>		ISSUES \$3.50 each	
		January 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		February 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		March 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		April 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		May 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		June 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		July 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		August 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		September 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		October 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		November 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		December 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Mid-December 1988	<input type="checkbox"/>
 <p>ALFRED HITCHCOCK P.O. Box 40 Vernon, New Jersey 07462</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Enclosed is check or money order for \$ _____ (Cost includes postage and handling) Make checks payable to ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE		
	Name _____ Street/No. _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery		

H9KC-5

A Burning Issue

by Susan Dunlap

I am not thorough. I don't explore every minute detail, every aspect and angle of a subject. Only fanatics do that. But there is a basic amount of preparation required of any adult who seeks to live in relative comfort without being pummeled by recurrent blows of humiliation. And that preparation is what I fail to do.

It is not that I am unaware of this fault. *Au contraire*. Rarely does a day pass without its being thrust to my attention. There are the small annoyances: grocery lists I tell myself I needn't write down; recipes I skim only to discover, as my guest sits angrily getting looped in the living room, that the last words are "Bake in 350° oven for ninety minutes."

There was the time when, as a surprise for Andrew, I painted the house. Anyone, I told myself, can paint a house. I did, after all, have two weeks, and it's not a mansion. This time I did not neglect the instructions on the paint can. I read them. What I did not do was consider if any preparation was necessary.

"Everybody knows you need to scrape off the old paint first," Andrew told me later. Everybody? I had the second coat halfway on before I realized the house looked like a mint-green moonscape. But all was not lost. The day I finished, it poured. As Andrew observed, "You don't use water-based paint outside."

I could go on—but you get the picture. I've often puzzled as to what causes this failing of mine. Is it laziness? Not entirely. A short attention span? Perhaps. "You don't prepare thoroughly," Andrew has told me again and again. "Why can't you force yourself?"

I don't know. I start to read directions, plodding through word by word, letting each phrase sink into my mind, like a galaxy being swallowed by a black hole. But after two or three paragraphs I'm mouthing hollow words and thinking of Nepal, or field goals, or whatever. And I'm assuring myself that I already know enough so that this brief review will stimulate my memory and bring all the details within easy calling range.

In fairness to Andrew, he has

accepted my failing. And well he should, since my decision to marry him was one of its more devastating examples.

I met him while planning a series of man-in-the-street interviews in Duluth. Easy, I thought. People love to hold forth on their opinions. (Not standing on a Duluth street corner in February, they don't.) Among the shivering, pasty males of Minnesota's northernmost major city, Andrew Greer beamed like a beacon of health. Lightly tanned, lightly muscled, with bright blue eyes that promised unending depths, he could discuss the Packers and Virginia Woolf; he could find a Japanese restaurant open at midnight; he could maneuver his Porsche through the toboggan run of Duluth streets at sixty miles an hour and then talk his way out of the ticket he deserved. And, most important, my failing, which had enraged so many others, amused him.

And so six weeks later (what could I possibly discover in a year that I hadn't found out already?) I married him.

We spent a year in Duluth, bought a Belgian sheepdog to lie around the hearth and protect us. ("Belgian sheepdogs are always on the move," I read later as Smokey relentlessly paced the apartment.) I left the

interviewing job and had a brief stint as an administrative assistant, and an even briefer one as a new-accounts person in a now defunct bank. In January Andrew came home aglow. He was being transferred to Atlanta.

I packed our furniture (which is now somewhere near Seattle, I imagine—there was some paragraph about labeling in the moving contract) and we headed south.

It was in Atlanta that I painted the house. And it was in Atlanta that I discovered what I had overlooked in Andrew. For all his interest in literature and sports and his acumen in business, he had one passion that I had ignored. The evidence had always been there; I should have seen it. Another person would have.

Above all else, Andrew loved sunbathing. Not going to the lake, not swimming, not water skiing—sunbathing. He loved the activity (or lack of it) of sitting in the sun with an aluminum reflector beneath his chin.

Each day he rushed home at lunchtime for half an hour's exposure. He oiled his body with his own specifically created castor oil blend, moved the reflector into place, and settled back—as Smokey paced from the living room to Andrew and back again.

The weekends were worse—he had all day. He lay there, not reading, not listening to music, begrudging conversation, as if moving his mouth to talk would blotch his tan.

I thought it would pass. I thought he would reach a desirable shade of brown and stop. I thought the threat of skin cancer would deter him. (Castor oil blocks the ultraviolet rays, he told me.) I coaxed, I nagged, I watched as the body that had once been the toast—no pun intended—of Duluth was repeatedly coated with castor oil and cooked till it resembled a rare steak left on the counter overnight. On the infrequent occasions he left the house before dark, people stared. But Andrew was oblivious.

Vainly, I tempted him with Braves tickets, symphony seats, the complete works of Virginia Woolf.

In March the days were lengthening. Andrew's firm moved him "out of the public eye." I suggested a psychiatrist, but the few Andrew called saw patients only during the daytime.

By April his firm encouraged him to work at home. Delighted, he bent over his desk from sunset till midnight and stumbled exhausted into bed. By nine each morning he was

in the sun. The only time he spoke to me was when it rained.

In desperation, I invited a psychiatrist to dinner for an informal go at Andrew. (That was the two-hour-late meal, and he was the looped guest I mentioned earlier.)

Finally I suggested divorce. But when I went to file, my lawyer insisted I read the Georgia statutes, this time carefully. It is *not* a community property state—far from it. And as Andrew pointed out, I was unlikely to be able to support myself.

So the only way left was to kill him. After all, it would matter little to him. If he'd led a good enough life he would pass on to a place closer to the sun. If not, he could hold his reflector near the fire.

For once I researched painstakingly, browsing through the poisonous-substance books in the public library, checking and rechecking. I found that phenol and its derivatives cause sweating, thirst, cyanosis (a blue coloring of the skin that would hardly be visible on Andrew's well tanned hide), rapid breathing, coma, and death. A fatal dose was two grams. Mixed thickly with Andrew's castor oil blend, I could use five times that and be assured he would rub it over his body in hourly ministrations before the symp-

toms were serious enough to interfere with his regimen. If he got his usual nine A.M. start Saturday morning, he would be red over brown over blue—and very dead by sundown.

I hesitated. I'm really not a killer at heart. I hated to think of him in pain. But given his habit, Andrew was slowly killing himself now.

I poured the phenol into Andrew's castor oil blend, patted Smokey as he paced by, tossed the used phenol container into the trunk of the car, and went off for a long drive.

I don't know where I went. (I thought I knew where I was going—I thought I wouldn't need a map.) Doubtless I was still in the city limits as Andrew applied the first lethal coating and lifted his reflector into place.

It was warm for April; ninety degrees by noon. I rolled down the window and kept driving. If I'd thought to check, I wouldn't have run out of gas. If I'd thought to bring my AAA card, I wouldn't have had to hitch a ride to the nearest hamlet.

The sun was low on the horizon but it was still well over a hundred degrees when I pulled

up in front of the house. Andrew's contorted body would be sprawled beside his deck chair. I hoped Smokey hadn't made too much fuss. Cautiously I opened the door. Warily I walked through the living room.

I heard a sound in the study and moved toward it.

Andrew sat at his desk.

He looked awful, but no more so than usual.

I ran back to the car and grabbed the phenol container out of the trunk. It was too hot to hold. I dropped it, picked up an oily rag, and tried again.

Slowly I read the instructions and the warning: "If applied to skin can cause sweating, thirst, cyanosis, rapid breathing, coma, and death." I read on. "Treatment: Remove by washing skin with water. To dissolve phenol, or retard absorption, mix with castor oil."

I slumped against the car. The sun beat down. *Why wasn't I more thorough?*

Glaring at the phenol container, I read the last line on the label: "Caution: Phenol is explosive when exposed to heat or oxidizing agents."

I dropped the oily rag. But of course it was too late.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



© N. Jay Jaffee

Four paces left of the striped seashell . . . We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the August Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 283.

The Gold of Mayani

by Walter Satterthwait

“Dead,” said Dr. Murmajee, small stubby hands clasped together below the round swell of stomach. As always on these occasions, he wore a sagging black suit, a limp white shirt, a drooping black tie flecked with soup stains, and a frown whose solemnity was not entirely persuasive. Staring down at the bed, he nodded with elaborate sadness. “Quite dead, oh my yes.”

“Yes,” said Sergeant Andrew Mbutu patiently. “To be frank, doctor, that is a fact I was able to determine for myself. I was hoping that you might be able to add to it.”

“Ah,” said Murmajee. He turned to Andrew, thick eyebrows raised in the round Indian face. “There will be an autopsy?” Fascinated by the innards of *Wazungu*, Europeans. As though he expected to find, hidden among them, some hitherto overlooked gland whose secretions produced white skins, internal combustion engines, computers, imperialism.

“Yes,” said Andrew. “Certainly.” Give the dog his bone.

“But in the meantime, what can you tell us about the corpse?”

“Ah,” said Murmajee, lower lip in a thoughtful pout. “Ah. Well, the knife, I should say—without committing myself precisely at this point in time, of course—I should say that the knife is rather suggestive. Yes? Wouldn’t you agree, sergeant?”

“Yes, doctor,” said Andrew, and sighed. Futile. No commitment until after the autopsy, lest someone pilfer the doctor’s new prize.

Little doubt, however, that the knife in question was indeed suggestive. Its black plastic handle, loosely encircled by stiff white fingers, protruded like a long, obscene power switch, set to *off*, from the solar plexus of the corpse.

The naked body lay on its back, open eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling. The single sheet—pale blue Egyptian cotton, befitting the luxurious bed of this luxury suite in this luxury hotel—was drawn up neatly to the man’s waist. As though the man, pre-death, had opted for an appearance of post-death modesty, despite the inherent



"THERE WAS A FAMOUS PURSUIT," SAID ANDREW. LINE DRAWINGS REMEMBERED FROM HISTORY BOOKS: MAYANI AND ATLEE DASHING ACROSS THE VELD T ON HORSEBACK, THE WIND TUGGING AT THEIR CLOTHES.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and ultimate immodesty of suicide.

Assuming, of course, that this was in fact a suicide.

"The angle, you see," said Murmaje. "There is no telling, oh my no, until we determine the length of the blade. But the angle is just exactly right, you see."

Murmaje bent forward, peering at the knife. "A push-button stiletto. Italian, I should think. A narrow blade, and likely long enough to penetrate the heart very nicely, yes. Not much exterior bleeding, as you see. Death would have been quite sudden. Shock, internal hemorrhage. *Poof*, eh?"

"The wound could have been self-inflicted?" Andrew asked him.

"Ah," said Murmaje, pouting again. "Ah. Self-inflicted. Could have been, yes. Possibly. And could have been otherwise." He shook his head. "Perhaps after the autopsy . . . ?"

Behind the two of them, standing at the long wooden dresser, Constable Kobari called out, "Sergeant?"

Andrew turned. Kobari was holding up—carefully, fingertips dainty along its edges—a worn leather wallet. "It was under the dresser," he told Andrew.

"Excuse me, doctor," Andrew said to Murmaje, and left him

bending over the body while he crossed the room to Kobari.

Kobari laid the wallet on the dresser top and stepped back. Andrew slipped his pen from his shirt pocket. He said in Swahili to Kobari, "You should've left it there until the Technical Unit took their photographs."

Kobari grinned. "If I had, sergeant, photographs wouldn't be the only thing they'd have taken. There's money inside."

Andrew nodded glumly; wouldn't be the first time evidence had vanished from a crime scene.

Using the pen, he eased the wallet open. Behind a scuffed transparent plastic screen was a driver's license made out to Bradford Quentin, who lived, who *had* lived, on a street in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States of America. The picture matched the face on the bed. The man's birthdate was April 7, 1936.

Fifty-three years old, then. He looked very fit for fifty-three. Except, of course, for the small matter of being dead.

Gingerly, with the pen and the tip of his index finger, Andrew pried open the money compartment. Three bills in there, each a hundred U.S. dollars. Other than those and the driver's license, the wallet was empty. No credit cards, no busi-

ness cards, no photographs of beaming wife and beaming children.

Andrew asked Kobari, "Could the wallet have fallen under the dresser accidentally?"

Kobari shook his head. "It has a backboard, this dresser, that reaches to the floor. I think he put it there deliberately, to hide it."

Andrew frowned. "If he were about to commit suicide, why would he hide his wallet?"

Kobari shrugged: Who knew why *Wazungu* did the lunatic things they did?

Andrew said, "His plane ticket."

Kobari looked puzzled. "Sergeant?"

"In order to get here from this Atlanta, Georgia, he had to take a plane, or possibly a boat. Where is the ticket?"

"I don't know, sergeant. It's not under the dresser."

They found the tickets—two of them—in the interior pocket of a white linen jacket hanging in the closet. Bradford Quentin had flown from the United States to the capital on the fifth of the month, and on the feeder flight from the capital to the Township on the sixth, yesterday. According to the tickets, he was due to return to the capital on the eighth, and to the U.S. on the ninth.

Standing outside the closet

door, Andrew tapped the tickets lightly with his finger. "If he were planning suicide, why would he buy a ticket all the way to Africa? And a return ticket at that? He could've killed himself more conveniently, and more cheaply, in Atlanta, Georgia."

"Perhaps he became suddenly depressed when he arrived," said Kobari. "Culture shock."

"A suicidal culture shock?"

"But, sergeant, if he arrived only yesterday, how could he have made an enemy who hated him badly enough to kill him?"

Andrew nodded. "We shall have to discover where he went yesterday, and with whom he spent time."

"Sergeant?"

Dr. Murmaje, approaching from the bed.

"Yes, doctor?" Andrew said.

"I've done all I can at the moment. I won't be able to add anything, I'm very much afraid, until after the autopsy."

"Your conclusions, doctor?"

"Ah," said Murmaje sadly. "Conclusions. Well, of course, as I say, everything is tentative until—"

"Can you estimate the time of death?" Andrew asked him.

Blinking, Dr. Murmaje said, "Oh my, certainly, sergeant, if you like. Lividity has progressed very nicely indeed, and

rigor too, and the body has cooled down extremely well. Convenient for our purposes, eh, these air conditioners? I should say that death occurred, oh my, perhaps eight or nine hours ago. Roughly speaking, of course."

Andrew looked at his watch. Ten thirty now. So between one thirty and two thirty this morning. Roughly speaking.

"Anything else, doctor?"

"Well, yes, there is one thing. Rather curious, I think. You might want to take a look, eh?"

Andrew and Kobari followed him over to the bed where the doctor, bending forward, ran his finger along the edge of the dead man's palm.

"Most curious," he said. "He seems to have developed a long callus sort of affair, right along this area. On both hands. From the tip of the little finger all the way down to the wrist. Clearly the man was in excellent physical shape, like someone who did manual labor, yes? But there are no calluses on the palms, only along here. Now what could have caused them, I wonder?"

"Karate," said Constable Kobari.

Andrew and the doctor looked at the constable.

"You practice with sandbags," Kobari explained to Andrew. "Hitting them." He made a short chopping gesture. "It's

to toughen the hands. You see, sergeant, I have this callus myself."

Andrew looked at the outstretched right hand. "Where?"

Kobari turned his hand around, brought it toward his face, and glared at it, frowning. Bringing up his left hand, he ran his fingers along the ridge of his right. Triumphantly, victory snatched from the palms of defeat, he said, "Here, sergeant, it's there, you can feel it."

Andrew touched the ridge of Kobari's hand and located an area that might, with some charity, have been considered an incipient callus.

"You do karate?" he asked the constable.

"Yes," said Kobari, putting his hands in his pockets before they had an opportunity to betray him again. "With Bwana Draper. He was in the Special Air Services in England."

"Ah." Andrew was momentarily entertained by an image of Kobari bounding about the room, hands chopping, feet flailing, a deadly Oriental dervish whirling into a blur.

His entertainment was short lived, however. For just then a hubbub at the door of the hotel suite announced that the Technical Unit had arrived with their cameras and measuring tapes and fingerprint powders.

At five o'clock that afternoon, just as Andrew finished typing up his last report of the day, Cadet Inspector Moi of the C.I.D. sauntered around the partition that separated Andrew's cubicle from Sergeant Oto's. Moi's pastel jumpsuit was today of a hue that Andrew decided was most probably cerise. The jumpsuits were an affectation which, like the plummy B.B.C. accent and the precisely trimmed goatee, Moi had acquired during his exchange year at London's Scotland Yard. He had also acquired, no one quite knew how, the notion that he was a cunning sleuth.

"Had a few moments free," Moi announced. "Thought we'd get together on this knifing thing." He eased himself into the empty chair, lightly tugged up his pants to spare their crease, then languidly crossed one long leg over the other, knee atop knee. "Suicide, of course. No doubt of it at all, eh?"

Andrew sat back against his chair. "And what of the wallet?"

Moi shrugged easily. "Who knows? Chap probably hid the thing all the time, whenever he was traveling. Creature of habit, eh? Did it without even thinking about it. Automatic."

"And he flew all the way here

from the United States to commit suicide?"

Another comfortable shrug. "There are stranger things in heaven and earth than you've dreamt of in your philosophy, Yorick."

Andrew frowned, puzzled.

"Look here, sergeant," said Moi with great reasonableness. "I just spoke with Murmajee. He's convinced that suicide was possible, if not probable. Tech Unit says the only prints on the knife were Quentin's. And you've seen all the reports. Chap arrived on the seven thirty flight from Nairobi, went directly to the hotel. Had dinner alone, talked to no one, went off alone to his room. Next thing we know, he's skewered. What else could it be *but* suicide?"

"Perhaps he met someone in Nairobi—"

"'Fraid not," said Moi. "Nairobi police had a go at that. Same thing there. Arrived at three in the afternoon, day before yesterday. Spent the night in his hotel room. Came down next day for breakfast and lunch, went back to his room afterward, both times. Checked out at five, caught a taxi for the airport. Met no one, talked to no one." Moi brushed a bit of lint from his pants. "And look, suppose he had. Suppose he made some enemy in Nairobi. How'd this other chap get here

in time to poke him? Seven thirty plane was the only one in yesterday. And he didn't come in *with* him—you've checked the passengers, right?"

Andrew nodded. Six tourists, four of them from Holland, two from Germany. A local European family: the Hendersons, mother, father, daughter, son, returning from a visit to the capital. Two local nurses returning from some medical conference. None of these had a motive, none had any apparent connection to the deceased, all had an alibi.

"There it is, then," Moi said. "Suicide. Plain as the nose on your face."

"Why the return trip ticket?"

Another shrug. "Used to be a requirement for entry into the country."

Back in the sixties and seventies, when the government tried to halt the flood of hippies. "Yes," Andrew said, "but no longer."

"Chap didn't know that, obviously."

"Perhaps. I still find it puzzling that the man would come here to kill himself. A journey of some thousands of miles, only to commit suicide?"

"Puzzling, yes, fair enough, but perhaps he'd simply gone off the beam. Eh? Happens, you know. Chap lived alone in the States—just got that from the

police in Atlanta. No family, no close friends. Retired. Spent most of his time brooding, probably. Nursing old wounds. Just snapped suddenly. Went bonkers, eh? Decided to go out in style. Bought the knife, bought the air ticket, came here, had a good meal or two, then stuck himself. Simple."

The man lying on that bed had not struck Andrew as the sort to brood. Superbly fit for his age, for any age, and trained in a sophisticated martial art. Highly trained, judging by those calluses. A man who, confronted with a problem, would deal with it directly, forcefully.

Long spatulate fingers stroking his goatee, Moi studied Andrew. "Look here, Mbutu. You're not going to go running around town asking more questions, are you?"

Andrew frowned. "How do you mean?"

"Well, you've done it often enough before, haven't you. Taken a case that's as good as wrapped up, and worried it, poked at it, sniffed around till you came up with some outrageous, contrary solution. Turned out to be right a fair amount of the time, I admit that. All very clever, of course, credit where credit is due, but I don't mind telling you it's made the C.I.D. look like nincompoops."

Andrew resisted the tempta-

tion to point out that certain individuals within the C.I.D. could contrive to look like nin-compoops without any help whatever.

Brow furrowed, immensely serious, Moi said, "I mean, criminal investigations, man, that's *our* job, isn't it? So suppose we just take it as given, you and I, that this one is solved, eh? What d'you say? A little *esprit de corps*. Harmony in the ranks and all that."

"What of the knife?"

Moi sat back, sighing. "What about the knife?"

"A switchblade. An uncommon weapon here. Illegal."

Moi held out his hand. "Well, there you are, eh? He brought it with him. *Everyone's* got them in the States. Boy Scouts, housewives, babes in the cradle."

"If he brought it with him, why was it not noticed at customs, and confiscated?"

"What, rolled up in a pair of knickers? How on earth would they spot it?"

"It would have shown on the fluoroscopes."

Moi smiled his celebrated Lestrade-trouncing smile and held up his long index finger. "Not if he checked his bag. They don't fluoroscope checked baggage, you see."

Sherlock Moi, Master of the Obvious.

Andrew said, "There were no baggage claim tickets among his effects."

"Good Lord, man, he threw them away. Who keeps the bloody things?" Moi shook his head, sighed theatrically, made his face go from exasperated to earnest, and said, "Look. Sergeant Mbutu. Andrew. Let's be reasonable about it. This was a suicide, plain and simple. Even if it *were* something else, which I tell you is impossible, we've virtually no way of proving it. I know the chief's got a lot of respect for your opinion. As well he should, of course. And I know he'll ask you for your feelings. I'd like to close this case out so we can get on with police business." What was this case, Andrew wondered, if not police business? "Man to man now," said Moi, "can't you just let it go?"

Regretfully, Andrew admitted to himself that for perhaps the first time since Andrew had known him, Moi might be right. There was, as he'd said, no way of proving this anything but a suicide.

Andrew nodded. "Very well."

Moi's eyebrows arched in surprise. "You mean it?"

Andrew nodded. "So long as no new evidence appears."

"Oh, it won't, it won't. Not a chance of it." He stood up, smoothed down his pants, and,

grinning happily, held out his hand to Andrew. "Good man. Glad we had this little chat. Enjoyed it. If I can ever do you a good turn, you let me know. One hand washes the other, eh? Ha ha."

“Andrew? *Andrew.*” Reluctantly, Andrew opened his eyes. Mary lay beside him, her elbow propped against the bed, her face peering down at his. Mary’s face was an object upon which he had gazed for years with fondness and gratitude, and frequently with amazement at its beauty; but at the moment, given a choice, he would have preferred the interior of his eyelids. “Uh,” he said.

Mary said, “There’s someone at the door.”

“Uh,” he said. He turned to look at the clock on the nightstand. Two o’clock. “Impossible,” he breathed, and closed his eyes.

“Andrew,” she said, and gently shook his shoulder.

This time Andrew heard it: a firm insistent rapping at the front door.

He opened his eyes.

“You see?” said Mary.

“Uh,” he said. With a prolonged, pained expiration, sigh and groan combined, he sat up and swung his legs off the bed.

His head flopped forward, threatening to topple off his neck, roll down his chest, go bouncing like a soccer ball across the floor.

Moonlight spilled between the curtains. The night was silent.

The rapping came again. An ominous sound in the stillness. Doors that were knocked upon in the middle of the night seldom opened onto anything pleasant.

“Uh,” he said, and pulled himself to his feet. Fumbling in the wardrobe, he found a freshly starched shirt—even Destiny might balk at Mary’s starch—and fumbled into it. Found a pair of pants and stumbled into those. Then shuffled out the door and across the moonlit sitting room, an obstacle course of dump trucks and racing cars and tiny spiked motorbikes. He stepped on something hard and sharp, and he jumped.

He bent down, picked it up. An item called an action figure, a futuristic soldier of indestructible plastic. Another diabolical invention of the United States.

He reached the door, unlatched it, pulled it open.

On the moonlit landing, Constable Duhanni. Standing at stiff attention, looking himself rather like an overgrown action figure awaiting orders. New, of course: only three weeks in the constabulary.

"Sorry to bother you, sir," said Constable Duhanni.

Andrew waved away the apology and discovered that he still held the plastic figure. Frowning, he tucked it away in his shirt pocket. "All right, constable. What is it?"

"They want you at the station, sir."

"They? Who?"

"The Assistant Minister, sir."

Andrew stopped in mid-yawn. "The assistant minister of what?"

"The Interior, sir. And his assistant, sir."

"The Assistant Assistant Minister?" His mind foggy, Andrew briefly wondered if he were asleep still, and dreaming, and doomed to play insane word games until he awoke howling in terror. "Why do they want me?"

"I don't know, sir. The chief only told me to come fetch you, sir."

"The chief is there?"

"Yes, sir."

The presence of assistant ministers, and their assistants, meant it was something serious; the presence of the chief, at any time after five o'clock in the afternoon, meant it was something earthshaking.

"These ministry people," Andrew said. "When did they arrive?"

"An hour ago, sir. They came

in by helicopter from the capital, sir."

Something serious indeed.

Constable Duhanni said, "I'll wait in the car, sir."

"That's all right, constable. You go on ahead. I'll take my moped."

The constable's eyes blinked. "Sorry, sir. Orders, sir. I'm supposed to bring you in the car, sir."

Andrew frowned. "What, am I under arrest?"

"Oh no, sir," said Duhanni, blinking some more. "No, of course not. It's just that the chief, sir, he was very firm about it, sir."

About what, in fact, was the chief not firm?

"All right," Andrew said. "I'll be out in a moment. And, constable?"

"Sir?"

"There's no need to call me sir. Sergeant will do."

"Yes, sir, sergeant."

“A h, sergeant,” said the chief from behind his desk. “Please come in.

This is Bwana Nu, the Assistant Minister of the Interior. And this is his associate, Bwana Teggay. Gentlemen, Sergeant Mbutu.”

The two men stood. As protocol demanded, Andrew shook hands first with Bwana Nu.

The chief was a big man, but Minister Nu was huge. Gigantic, enormous: looking like nothing so much as an extremely well fed cartoon cannibal who had been polished to a high gloss and then stuffed into a black suit several sizes too snug. Towering over Andrew, his teeth gleaming like a piano keyboard through his grin, he jerked Andrew's arm up and down as though he were trying to pump water up from thirty meters below ground.

"Pleased to meet you, sergeant," he beamed. "Pleased to meet you. The chief here, he's been relating some of your adventures. Amazing stories, too. And you're one of his most excellent men, isn't that right?"

He let go of Andrew's hand; with difficulty, Andrew bit back a hiss of relief. "Well, minister," he said weakly. "There are many fine officers in the constabulary."

"Ha ha ha," boomed Minister Nu, and clapped him on the shoulder. Andrew staggered slightly to the side. "And modest, too," said Nu. "I entirely admire a man with the modesty. Maybe because I don't have any myself." He boomed again: "Ha ha ha. We're gonna get along just fine, sergeant. You say hello now to my assistant here."

Bwana Teggay was an altogether different order of being.

Slim, slight, Andrew's height, he wore a suit of tropical weight charcoal-grey wool, its pin-stripes so subtle they might have been imaginary, its tailoring so sleek it might have been devised by the man's own genes. He was young, in his early thirties, Andrew's age. His small brown eyes were clear and sharp; his smile was as trim and taut as the man himself.

"How do you do, sergeant," he said crisply, and crisply he shook Andrew's hand. "Sorry to drag you out like this in the middle of the night. Have a seat, please, and the minister will explain why we called you in."

After Teggay and Nu had seated themselves, the minister taking a few moments to settle his bulk comfortably within the chair, Andrew sat. He glanced at the chief. The chief's face was empty. The chief's face was always empty.

"Well now," said Nu, beaming as he leaned forward and planted heavy forearms atop knees the size of pineapples. "That man you found this morning in the hotel room. Who do you think that man was?"

"Quentin Bradford, you mean?" Andrew said.

"Ha ha," said the minister with a great grin. "Well, sure, my friend, that's what his passport says. You bet you. That's what his driving license says.

But that's not what the Ministry of Records says. No sir."

"The Ministry of Records?"

"That's right, my friend," Nu grinned. "That man in the hotel room, that man was Robert Atlee."

Andrew hesitated. "Robert Atlee," he said blankly.

Minister Nu frowned: puzzled, perhaps, to find himself in anticlimax when he had so obviously been promoting high drama. "You don't know this name? Robert Atlee?"

"No, minister, I'm sorry I—oh. Atlee? Robert Atlee? The Englishman friend of Abraham Mayani?"

Minister Nu sat back with a satisfied grin, order having evidently been restored to the universe. "That's the one. You bet you."

"But—why? That was over thirty years ago. Why would he come back here now?"

"Ha ha ha," boomed the minister happily. "That's what we want you to find out."

"Me?" He glanced at the chief. Nothing.

"We're gonna take you out of the police for a while and put you to work for us. You're gonna be like a private detective, eh? Like Mike Hammer. You ever read this Mike Hammer?"

"No. I am afraid not, minister."

"Very good stuff, my friend. One time this Mike Hammer

chap, he's gotta go somewhere, see, and he doesn't wanna leave the villain alone. So what he does, he nails that villain's hand to the *floor!* With a *sledgehammer!*" Gleefully, he slapped his massive thigh. "Ha ha ha. Very good stuff. The best. I'll send you some of these books, okay?"

"Yes," Andrew said. "Thank you, yes. But I do not entirely understand what you wish of me, minister."

Nu held up a hand as big as a flounder. "Don't you worry. Jimmy here's gonna fill you in with all the details." He hauled himself to his feet. "Right now I've gotta go and utilize the phone. Chief, you wanna come and have that drink?"

"Of course," said the chief, and stood. "But if I might add something, minister?"

Nu waved expansively. "You bet you, chief. Absolutely."

"Sergeant, you should understand that the decision as to whether you assist the ministry will be entirely your own. Your participation will be voluntary. Isn't that correct, minister?"

"Absolutely. You bet you. Voluntary is absolutely correct." Nu was beaming happily, but his glance held the chief's, and Andrew had a sudden sense of undercurrents here, of powerful human wills brought abruptly into conflict. For an instant, the office walls contracted.

The chief's glance never wavered.

"Well," said Bwana Teggay into the silence. "I'll just put Sergeant Mbutu in the picture, then, shall I?"

Minister Nu turned to him and said, "Good, Jimmy, you do that." The walls snapped back to their original size. "Come along, chief," he grinned. "Let's get that drink."

"Now," said Bwana Teggay. "What do you know, sergeant, about Abraham Mayani?"

Andrew shrugged. "I know he operated during The Troubles as a kind of . . . Robin Hood figure."

Teggay savored this for a moment, and then smiled his trim, taut smile. "Robin Hood, yes. As good a description as any. And about Robert Atlee?"

"Mayani's friend. One of the few *Wazungu* who fought against the colonials."

"Yes," he said with the small prim nod of a schoolmaster.

"The only one, actually. Up until 1953, Mayani and Atlee were both sergeants in the G.S.U." Before Independence, the paramilitary branch of the constabulary. In the early fifties, it had grown to the size of the regular army. "They'd been raised together here in your town-

ship—Atlee's father owned the Atlee Ginnyery, and Mayani's father was his foreman. There was talk that Atlee had been involved with Mayani's sister, Rebecca, but no proof was ever adduced. Just another part of the myth, no doubt. According to the legends, Atlee slept with half the women in the country, African and European alike."

Andrew nodded: he had heard the legends.

"As I'm sure you know," Teggay continued, "those were years of turmoil. Our Great Leader was still in prison, but cells of Freedom Fighters were operating throughout the country, striking everywhere. There was even a clandestine organization within the G.S.U. itself. Mayani was an obvious candidate for this group—he was intelligent, physically strong, and extremely charismatic. He was approached, but he declined to join them. His political awareness hadn't quite achieved ripeness, apparently."

This said without even a glimmer of irony. Andrew felt his first prickle of unease.

"What radicalized Mayani was the murder of his father and sister. The father, Joseph, was one of the activists calling for a general strike—a politically more sophisticated man, apparently, than his son. For weeks he was harassed by the

police, both the regular branch and G.S.U. Finally, on the night of June 21, he was attacked in his house. He and his daughter were shot to death."

Andrew nodded. "I read of this. The case never came to trial."

Teggay smiled his small tight smile. "Hardly surprising, since the coroner's report indicated that the weapon used was a Webley .45 automatic revolver. Which at the time, of course, was the service weapon of the constabulary."

"Still, it was never proved that the police were responsible."

Another smile, this time with an element in it almost of pity. "Not in a court of law, no."

Scurry along, Andrew told himself. "It was at this time, was it not, that Mayani left the G.S.U.?"

"Yes. He applied for sympathetic leave, and the captain of his unit denied it. So Mayani simply deserted. He and Atlee both."

"Atlee had applied for leave as well?"

"Yes. Also denied." Teggay frowned slightly and glanced at the floor, as though trying to find there the thread of his narrative. He looked up. "The two of them were spotted by a G.S.U. squad at the funeral of Joseph and Rebecca Mayani. The G.S.U.

gave chase, but Mayani and Atlee eluded them. For several weeks nothing was heard of either man. Then, in July, they burned to the ground a farmhouse belonging to their unit captain, thirty miles north of the capital. No one was hurt. The captain was away—chasing down a reported sighting of Mayani, as it happened—and Mayani and Atlee emptied the house at gunpoint."

"As I recall," said Andrew, "no one was ever hurt in any of Mayani's operations."

Another schoolmaster's nod. "Correct. And throughout the next year, as more men joined him, there were a number of operations in the western part of the country, where he was hiding. Sabotage, mostly—bridges burned, train tracks dynamited. Most of these directed at the G.S.U. It was a hit and miss approach, tactically brilliant but strategically naïve. Mayani simply failed to understand the importance of an organized, politically based guerrilla effort."

"He never allied himself with any other group, as I recall," said Andrew.

"Correct," said Teggay. "He was an adventurer, unwilling to accept the idea of a centrally organized, firmly disciplined, democratic people's liberation front."

All this said, once again, with a perfectly straight face, providing Andrew his second prickle of unease.

"Then," said Teggay, "in July of 1954, he pulled off his most ambitious effort. He robbed the constabulary payroll."

"Yes," Andrew said. "The Gold of Mayani."

A brief nod. "Exactly. By then, the work of our Freedom Fighters had made a shambles of the economy. Merchants were refusing to accept the government's currency. So the High Commissioner arranged for a shipment of gold from England. Twenty-five thousand British pounds, in sovereigns. To keep the shipment secret, he decided to have it delivered by sea, some two hundred kilometers north of here, and then bring it by lorry, under heavy guard, to the capital. It wasn't an especially clever plan, but evidently he wasn't an especially clever man. In any event, Mayani found out. He highjacked the shipment as it was being off-loaded from the ship. He and Atlee, and the gold, were never seen again."

"Some of his men were caught, as I recall."

"Yes. And executed. But none would, or could, reveal anything about Mayani's plans."

"There was a famous pursuit." Line drawings remem-

bered from the secondary school history books: Mayani and Atlee dashing across the veldt on horseback, the wind tugging at their clothes.

"He was chased the length of the country," said Teggay. "By the G.S.U. and the regular army. He was seen everywhere—including here, in your township. You know, of course, that his high school teacher, Daniel Tsuto, was living here."

"And does still. A very old man now."

"Yes. Something of a legend himself, I gather. He's one of the people with whom we'd like you to talk."

Suddenly realizing, Andrew said, "You believe that Robert Atlee came back for the gold?"

For the first time Teggay's smile showed his teeth: small and pointed, like a rodent's. "Full points, sergeant," Teggay said. "Why else would he return?"

"Mayani, you think, is still alive?"

"Mayani's dead," he said curtly. "He was wounded during the highjacking—witnesses saw it happen."

"The story is that he crossed the border to the west."

"Legend," said Teggay. "Myth. The man died of his wounds. Atlee hid the gold, escaped, and he's only now come back to retrieve it."

"Why wait so long?"

"Who knows? Perhaps he took with him enough to live comfortably for a while, and now it's gone. Perhaps he was afraid for his life."

"But he is seen here as a hero," Andrew said. "He could have come back at any time, openly."

Teggay's smile was pitying once again. "Not to retrieve the gold. It's the property of the government."

"The British government?"

"Our government. The legally constituted government of this republic. Do you know how much that gold is worth now, sergeant?"

"Much more, I should think, than it was."

"Close to three quarters of a million British pounds. Over a million U.S. dollars."

Andrew frowned. "Why is it you want me to assist you? Why not conduct a full-scale investigation?"

Teggay shifted in his seat, crossed his legs. "We want to keep a low profile on this. If word gets out about the gold, we'd be overrun by treasure seekers. The minister will be returning to the capital within the hour. I'll be checking into one of your hotels under an assumed name. Except for you and your chief, no one in the Township will ever know of the

ministry's interest in this case."

If they believed that, both the minister and Bwana Teggay seriously underestimated the efficiency of Township gossip.

"Besides," Teggay said, "you know the people here. They'll be more likely to talk to you."

Oh yes. Be stumbling over themselves in a rush to talk to him. As usual. "What makes you think the gold is here, in the Township?"

Raising his right eyebrow, Teggay said, "I should think that's obvious. This was Atlee's destination. He was due to return to the capital on the eighth. He wouldn't've had time to range very far afield. And your chief told us tonight about the local legends. How it sometimes happens, when a family's having hard times, that they suddenly find money on their doorstep. Left there during the night. The Gold of Mayani, the stories say."

Andrew nodded. "It is true, yes, that people in such circumstances have found this money. But currency, not gold."

Teggay shrugged lightly. "It's a small matter to convert gold to currency. Any of the Asians in the local shops could do it. And discreetly, too—for a price. No, the gold is somewhere nearby."

"And whoever has the gold is the person who killed Atlee?"

"Yes, of course," said Teggay. Dismissively. Atlee's murder clearly no concern of his.

"One thing, sergeant," Teggay said. "I want you to understand this. As your chief pointed out, your cooperation is entirely voluntary. But if you choose to work with us, you'll be paid double your usual wages. And, of course, your help will be greatly appreciated by the ministry." He smiled. "As I'm sure you know, it doesn't hurt to have friends in the ministry."

The carrot, Andrew thought.

"On the other hand," said Teggay smoothly, "it's also perfectly true that it doesn't help to have, shall we say, a lack of friends."

And the stick.

"They want the gold," Andrew said. "Of course," Mary said. "The economy today is as bad as it was during The Troubles. We can use the gold."

"They want the gold," Andrew said, "for themselves. Not for the state, not for the ministry."

They were in the kitchen, sipping cardamum-spiced coffee at the small, Formica-topped table. Dawn had arrived: between the curtains the sky had faded to the color of milk. Time, soon, to awaken the children.

Mary looked at him for a moment, finally frowned. "Andrew. Are you sure?"

"Why arrive in secret? Why assign me to this, and not some agent of the ministry? Why have me report, as Teggay insisted, only to Teggay? To maintain a low profile, yes, certainly. So low that if the gold is found, they can slip away with it."

"Why would the minister come himself?"

"To impress the insignificant sergeant with the significance of his mission."

"But if you do find the gold, then you'll know—" she stopped suddenly, her mouth parted.

Andrew smiled at her over his coffee cup. "An insignificant sergeant in a tiny township can be dealt with easily enough."

"You cannot do this," she announced, setting down her cup. "You'll have to tell them you cannot do this. Tell them some lie. Your son is sick. Your wife is hysterical."

He smiled. "My wife *is* hysterical."

"Andrew—"

"Too late," he told her. "I have already agreed."

"But why?"

"If I refuse, they can make life very difficult for me." He sipped at his coffee. "And for you. And for the children."

"We've had difficulties before. Better difficulties with you

here, a part of us, than an easy life without you."

"No one said anything about my not being here."

"But what happens if you find that gold?"

"No one has found it in thirty years."

"No one has looked. If you *do* find it—"

Andrew shrugged. "Some threats, perhaps. Perhaps a bribe." He smiled again. "New action figures for the children."

She shook her head. "Talk to the chief. He'll do something, you know he will."

"Yes, and then the chief and I will be in the same position."

"But how do they justify this?"

"Taking the gold? I'm sure that Minister Nu would justify it simply on the basis that he wanted it. Teggay..." He smiled. "Teggay would devise some complicated argument proving that the gold belonged to him by historical necessity."

"Andrew—"

"Too late, Mary," he said.

"But what are you going to do?"

"Look for the gold," he said. He smiled. "And pray I do not find it."

Assistant Assistant Minister Teggay had generously told Andrew that he was free to select an assistant of his own. Andrew decided not to do so:

Kobari was best left out of this. At eight in the morning, when the shops opened, he drove downtown perched in civilian clothes atop his moped. "*Be discreet*," Teggay had said. "*This isn't a police inquiry, remember.*"

From Muhammad Banir, Dealer in Rare Coins and Antiquities, he learned that twenty-five thousand British sovereigns would weigh almost exactly two hundred kilograms. Light enough to be carried by two men on horseback. (Although not for very long at the flared-nostril, wide-eyed gallop of those horses in the history books.) In wrapped rolls of fifty sovereigns each, the coins would take up approximately the space of four standard shoeboxes.

Fat Muhammad Benir, hugely amused by Andrew's questions, asked him what he was attempting to do—track down the gold of Mayani? So much for discretion. By nightfall the entire Township would know of Sergeant Mbutu's mad quest. Perhaps a good thing, Andrew realized. Safety in numbers.

No, Muhammad Banir told him with a grin, there had been no single individual who had, over the past thirty years, consistently exchanged gold sovereigns for currency.

Even if he were telling the truth, which in Banir's case was approximately as likely as

his lying, this meant nothing. There were other coin dealers in the Township; and as Teggay said, any of the thousand or so Indian shopkeepers would have been delighted to take gold.

Assuming that they had been given it. Assuming that the gold of Mayani were actually here. And assuming that whoever possessed it had been using it as a kind of private charitable fund for thirty years.

These were assumptions that Andrew was increasingly unwilling to make. He knew that money had been left surreptitiously at the homes of distressed families. (And by these, to sidestep envy, often surreptitiously spent.) He knew that local legend ascribed the charity to Mayani. But he also knew that local legends were frequently more a matter of desire than of fact. People wanted to believe Mayani alive: the money provided the "proof."

Probably Atlee had taken the gold with him thirty years ago. Probably he'd spent it all. Probably, as Moi had said, as the evidence suggested, his death was a suicide. The gold gone, Atlee returned to Africa to end his life. Out of guilt, perhaps. In expiation.

As he drove away from Muhammad Benir's shop, Andrew's spirits began to rise.

The young woman smiled. Attractive, in her middle twenties, she wore a sleeveless bright yellow European-style dress, buttoned up the front and belted. She said to Andrew through the opened door: "My grandfather prefers to talk to guests in the *shamba*." The garden. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all," Andrew told her.

Another smile. "That way then," pointing to the right. "I'll go fetch him."

"Thank you," said Andrew, and went round the small cinder block house, following a sandy pathway worn in the sparse grass.

Unlike most of the African *shambas* in the Township, this one was devoted not to vegetables and fruits but to flowers. The small square yard was fenced in by a tall wooden latticework on two sides; the third side, facing the house, was a cascade of roses, an explosion of color in the clear tropical sunlight, reds and pinks and whites and yellows so vibrant they seemed to shimmer.

In the shade of a trellis heavy with more of them, startled bursts of red against the glossy green, sat a round white metal table and four white metal chairs, paint flaking from all. Andrew had barely seated him-

self when the back door opened and the old man shuffled out. Andrew sprang to his feet: legends, face to face, deserved respect.

At least eighty years old now, tufted hair white, face eroded, cheeks sunken, the old man still held himself erect, a triumph of will over gravity and time. He wore black slacks, a pair of imitation leather slippers. A white European-style shirt, tieless, buttoned at the knobby wrists and at the corded neck, cuffs and collar both too large.

"Sergeant Mbutu," said Daniel Tsuto, and held out a hand ropy with vein and ligament. Andrew took it; the man's grip was firm, like his voice. "Sit, sit," said the old man, waving Andrew back into his chair and then lowering himself into the chair opposite. Slowly, stiffly: Andrew could hear, almost, the old bones creak.

"I knew one of your teachers," said the old man. "David Obutu. He was a student of mine, you know."

"Yes, *m'zee*, I know." *M'zee* a term of honor granted to elders.

"He was disappointed when you left the university."

Andrew nodded. "Yes, *m'zee*. I had no choice."

The old man returned the nod. "Yes, yes. Choice is often

a luxury, eh? Beyond a certain point, only the gods have choices, and perhaps not even they." He placed his hands, one atop the other, in his lap. In Swahili, he said, "How may I help you, sergeant?"

Andrew answered in the same language. "*M'zee*, I come to ask you about Robert Atlee and Abraham Mayani."

The old man smiled. His teeth were large, rectangular, pale yellow like old ivory: dentures. "The constabulary is investigating legends now, sergeant?"

"Early yesterday morning, a man was found murdered at the Sinbad Hotel. The man was Robert Atlee."

Daniel Tsuto's smile vanished and his head darted suddenly backward against the collar of his shirt. "Robert Atlee? *Here?*" Clearly surprised.

"Yes, *m'zee*. He was stabbed."

The old man frowned. Thoughtful, he looked off for a moment, as though eyeing the splendor of his rosebushes. He turned back to Andrew. "There's no question that the man was Robert Atlee?"

"None. His fingerprints were sent to the Ministry of Records. Because all members of the G.S.U. had been fingerprinted, his were on file."

Another frown. "They found them so quickly? In one day?

Fast work for bureaucrats. And you are investigating his death?"

"Not exactly, *m'zee*. I am conducting a related, but separate, inquiry."

"And what might that be?"

Discretion. "There are certain individuals in the government who believe that Robert Atlee returned here for a specific purpose. I have been assigned to determine—"

"The gold," said Daniel Tsuto. Abruptly, he smiled. "This was the reason the secret ministry helicopter came here last night?"

Truly, certain secrets were hopeless in a township this size. Andrew smiled back. "Yes, *m'zee*."

Daniel Tsuto's laugh was raspy, smoky. "If they wanted to keep it secret, why land it at the airport, where the entire Township might see it? Why not land it somewhere outside?"

Andrew shrugged. "I don't know, *m'zee*."

The old man shook his head. "Fools. That fat swine Ronald Nu, I suppose? He still searches for the gold?"

"Still?" Rather unsettled at hearing a minister called a fat swine, no matter how aptly.

"He was here, in the Township, during The Troubles," said Daniel Tsuto. "After Abraham took the gold. He sat, in fact,

exactly where you sit now. And he was conducting—" another smile "—a separate inquiry, just as you are. He's very fond, you see, of separate inquiries."

"He was here in what capacity, *m'zee*?"

Just then, the door to the house swung open and Daniel Tsuto's granddaughter emerged into the yard, carrying two large glasses of limeade. Smiling, she gave one to Andrew, who thanked her, and gave the other to Daniel Tsuto. "I had to go to the *duka*," she said. The shop. "We were out of limes."

"That bandit overcharges," said the old man.

"Limes cost four times as much in Sweden," she said cryptically.

"Because they make them out of snow." He turned to Andrew. "She spent an exchange year in Sweden. Eating snow and counting her toes to make sure they hadn't fallen off."

She smiled at Andrew. "Grandfather doesn't approve of Sweden."

"Free love and snow. No wonder they kill themselves so often." He smiled at the young woman. "Thank you, Joanna."

She nodded, smiled again at Andrew, and left.

Daniel Tsuto turned to Andrew. He sipped his limeade. "In what capacity, you ask. He'd been here earlier that day,

part of the official G.S.U. investigation, asking whether I'd seen Abraham. I'd told them no. Later he returned by himself. Told me he was seeing some girl in town, a nurse, who swore she'd seen Abraham near my house. Then he hinted he was more than he seemed. Well, that much I never doubted. He looks and acts like a buffoon, but he's as sly as a jackal. A very dangerous man, sergeant. Take care with him."

"What did he mean, 'more than he seemed'?"

"He was implying that he was an officer of the secret faction within the G.S.U., the 'freedom fighters.'" The old man's lips curled with scorn as he said the phrase. "He suggested that his only concern was Abraham's welfare. If I could help locate Abraham, Nu would help him escape."

"What did you tell him?"

"The same thing I'd told the others earlier. That I hadn't seen Abraham."

"Do you think it likely he told the truth? About being an officer of the secret faction?"

The old man shrugged. "I know he told the truth. He was the man who tried to recruit Abraham into this group."

Andrew took a sip of limeade. "Abraham Mayani told you this?"

A small nod. "Yes."

"When?"

The old man lifted a hand and waved it vaguely. "Sometime long before." He leaned slightly forward. "Did you know, sergeant, that Abraham's father and sister were murdered?"

"Yes. No arrest was ever made."

The old man nodded. "They were murdered only two weeks after Abraham refused to join Nu's organization." He sat back.

Andrew sipped again at his drink, found that it tasted suddenly sour. "You think," he said, "that Ronald Nu ordered the murders."

"Not ordered. No, a subordinate might later talk. I believe he killed them himself."

"To anger Abraham Mayani. To bring him into his group."

"Exactly."

"Did Mayani believe this?"

"Bah. Abraham. He was a fool. Running around the countryside. Blowing up bridges. A boy playing at pirates and cowboys. Lawrence of Arabia."

"What should he have done, then?" Andrew asked. "Joined the freedom fighters?"

"Freedom fighters." More scorn. "Oh yes, very well-intentioned, very noble souls, most of them. Until they finally obtained the pie for which they'd been fighting. Then of course they became politicians, and split it up among themselves."

He picked up his limeade, brought it to his lips.

Andrew asked the old man, "What do you think he should have done, *m'zee*?"

Daniel Tsuto set down the glass. Suddenly he smiled. "Who can say, sergeant? Certainly not an old man like I. He should have studied flowers, perhaps." He waved his hand toward the wall of flowers. "Planted roses." Another smile. "Who can say?"

Andrew said, "What do you think happened to him?"

The old man shrugged lightly. "He died, of course. I understand he was wounded during the highjacking. We all die, sergeant. Abraham. A rose. You and I."

"And the gold?"

"Lost. Gone forever. Buried, probably, before he died."

"Do you think Atlee knew of its location?"

"Perhaps. We shall never know."

At the public library Andrew spent over an hour and discovered several suggestive facts. He also discovered—and took along with him, to read later—an old history book with a picture in it of Abraham Mayani and Robert Atlee. According to the caption, the black and white photograph had been taken by one of Mayani's men, just before the attack on the

gold shipment. The two men stood side by side in battered military khakis, bareheaded, grinning in the glare of sunlight, each with an arm over the other's shoulder. Mayani was slightly shorter than Atlee, but even so he seemed the more impressive of the two. Both were handsome men, but Mayani's grin was wider, bolder. He seemed more vital, more vigorous; seemed not only to draw comfort from his youth and strength, as Atlee did, but to revel in them.

The Atlee in the photograph was recognizable, just, as the same man who had lain dead on the bed at the Sinbad. The younger version and the older could have been two separate people. And of course—despite the resemblance, despite their sharing some long-ago early years—they were.

Even in here, in the office, hung the cloying smell of disinfectant. A small fan shuddered at the open window, but served only to stir the dense, warm air sluggishly around the narrow room.

The white-uniformed woman sitting on the far side of the desk was in her fifties, big, heavysset, her face round and jowly, her eyes pinched between rolls of flesh. Her two front teeth were gold. A most

formidable personage.

Andrew said, "You were on the plane from the capital, matron. Your name is on the manifest."

"Of course I was on the plane. I told that to the other policemen." Testy, impatient, a woman used to giving the orders and asking the questions. "Look, sergeant, I'm very busy. I've a hospital to run."

"You did know that one of the other passengers on the plane, a man, was murdered yesterday morning?"

"So I was told. What's that to do with me? You think I killed him? I was here, making rounds all night."

"And you know, of course, that man was Robert Atlee."

She blinked, furrowed her brow, frowned heavily. "Who?" A fine performance.

Andrew smiled. "Matron, I should think it unlikely that you'd be unfamiliar with this name, even if you hadn't lived here in the Township during The Troubles. In the fifties, the man was a hero."

"I didn't live here during The Troubles," she said. "I didn't come here till afterward."

"I'm sorry, matron, but that is untrue. The public library keeps very good records, among them a book written by a local European woman. It has photographs. And among those is

a photograph of the staff of Dr. Hamilton's clinic, which, as you know, preceded this hospital. In 1955, you were one of the three nurses working there." She had been a striking woman then, tall, slender, proud.

She waved a hand dismissively. Brazening it out. "Yes, well, so what? Is that supposed to mean something?"

"It means that you would have known Robert Atlee. Would have known who he was, and possibly would have known him personally. His father owned the Atlee Ginney, an important man. It means, in all likelihood, that you recognized him when you saw him on that plane two days ago."

"Nonsense. Thirty years ago. Who recognizes people after all that time?"

"The two of you were on a small airplane for two hours, matron. Time enough for the memory to return. He had changed, certainly, but he was still recognizable." She had changed as well, but more so; changed enough that Robert Atlee, had he once known her, had he noticed her on the plane, would never have guessed her identity.

"I think, too," said Andrew, "that thirty years ago you would have recognized Abraham Mayani if you had seen him near Daniel Tsuto's house."

More blinking. "Abraham Mayani?" Her voice pitched a shade higher.

"I have learned that thirty years ago, Ronald Nu, the current Assistant Minister of the Interior, was a member of the G.S.U., which at the time was searching for Mayani. Bwana Nu had a woman friend here in the Township. This woman was a nurse. It was she who told Bwana Nu that she had seen Mayani. That woman was you, matron, was it not?"

"That's ridiculous." Bluster. "I wasn't the only nurse in the Township then."

"There were five nurses in the Township then. Three at Dr. Hamilton's clinic, two at Dr. Hannab's. All of them, except for you, were women in their forties or fifties."

Trying for anger now, almost succeeding: "Sergeant, you're wasting my time. Whoever told you about me and Minister Nu was lying. The only time I've seen the man was in the newspapers."

Time to produce the famous sledgehammer.

Quietly, not at all enjoying this, Andrew said, "Mayani is still a hero, matron. And rumors travel quickly in this township. Life would not go well for someone who was accused of informing on him."

She stared at him. She pursed

her lips, took a long deep breath. "You can't prove that."

"No. But rumors do not require proof."

She looked down at her desk, lifted a ballpoint pen, dropped it. Looked up. "What is it, exactly, you want from me?"

"Only the answer to a single question. When you recognized Robert Atlee on the airplane two days ago, did you notify Minister Nu that the man had returned to the Township?"

She stared at him again, longer this time. At last, firmly, decisively, she said, "No." She stood, authority and command restored. "This is preposterous. I recognized no one. I notified no one. And now, sergeant, if you'll excuse me. As I said, I've a hospital to run."

Andrew, who had been leaning slightly forward, now abruptly experienced that feeling which obtains at the top of a stairway when one takes a step which, remarkably, is not there.

He looked at her face. Shuttered, blank. He stood. "Thank you, matron."

The bloody woman was lying. She *had* to be.

His moped leaning on its kickstand at the beach road, fifty yards behind him, Andrew sat in the thin shade of a thorn tree atop a tall sand dune. To his right, far off, the

minarets and gleaming high-rise luxury hotels of the Township. To his left, the tangle of bright green mangrove swamp stretching off into infinity. Below him, the beach, an empty expanse of bone white sand. Beyond that, the blue sea, empty as well, flat and featureless out to the horizon.

She recognizes Robert Atlee on the plane. She follows him to his hotel. She informs Nu by telephone of Atlee's location. Nu commandeers a ministry helicopter, flies to the Township, lands somewhere outside. As Daniel Tsuto had pointed out, this could be done with no one the wiser.

Nu goes to Atlee's hotel. Kills him.

Why?

According to Daniel Tsuto, Nu had known Mayani. Mayani and Atlee were in the same G.S.U. company. Nu, therefore, had known Atlee.

Later, after the hijacking, Nu was in the township looking for Mayani. Mayani and Atlee had fled together. Suppose Nu found not Mayani but Atlee. Suppose he and Atlee worked a deal. Atlee's life, and a share of the gold, in exchange for the rest of the gold and Mayani's whereabouts. Nu kills Mayani, then helps Atlee escape.

Why help Atlee? Why not simply kill him?

Atlee, somewhere, has left a record of the transaction. If he dies, the facts will be revealed.

Yes. And so, for over thirty years now, Nu and Atlee keep their shameful secret. That they betrayed Mayani and stole the gold.

And then Atlee returns. Why?

Guilt? Greed? His share of the gold gone, he returns to threaten Nu with exposure?

No matter. Nu kills him.

But if the gold is gone, why then this secret hunt for it?

Ah, but how secret was it? Precisely secret enough to provide a major topic of gossip for the Township. The ministry helicopter landing at the airport in the middle of the night. Sergeant Mbutu snooping about the town, asking "discreet" questions which themselves were answers.

Not foolishness, as Daniel Tsuto had said, but slyness. The slyness of a jackal. If Nu pretends to believe the gold still exists—and by now the entire Township thinks he does—what motive has he for killing Robert Atlee?

All of this, if true, left Andrew in an interesting position. If he could find any proof to support these conjectures, he would soon have to accuse the Assistant Minister of the Interior, not a pleasant man at best, of murder.

When Andrew entered Bwana Teggay's hotel room late that afternoon, to ask a series of what he hoped were carefully disguised questions, he saw that the man was packing. In a trim safari suit of beige Egyptian cotton, Teggay stood bent over his suitcase, arranging the clothes inside.

"Ah, Mbutu. Good to see you. You've heard, I suppose."

"Heard?" Andrew said.

"About the confession."

"Confession?"

Smiling his thin smile, carefully folding a pair of brown twill slacks into the suitcase, Teggay said, "So you haven't heard. Well, you're off the case. It's closed. We got a confession just an hour ago. Apparently Atlee's return had nothing to do with the gold. It seems he spent it all. Came back here for reasons of his own. Picked up some chippie on the beach, took her to his room, and tried a bit of rough and tumble. She stabbed him. It's as simple as that. I've already called the minister and told him. He agrees it's time to fold our tents."

Believing what he did, Andrew would have found this story dubious in any event. That it sounded much like one of Cadet Inspector Moi's notorious summaries only increased his distrust. He asked, "Who is

the woman who confessed?"

Teggay shrugged. "A nobody. Some local nurse."

"Do you know her name?"

The man told him, and Andrew suddenly understood.

Holding the library book, Andrew knocked at the front door. He waited for quite some time. No one came. He knocked again. Waited.

At last he turned away and followed the sandy path round the house and into the small enclosed back yard. Wearing the same clothes he had worn earlier, his hands in his lap, his shoulders slumped, the old man sat beneath the blossom-laden trellis, staring off at the wall of rosebush. The light was thinner now, the colors faded, the roses diminished. Soon the sun would set.

The old man sensed Andrew's presence, for he looked up, squinted, then nodded once, expressionless. He looked off again at his roses.

Andrew said, "May I sit down, m'zee?"

"Yes." Indifferently, without a glance.

Andrew sat, putting the book in his lap. For a moment he said nothing. In the trees somewhere a bird squawked, low and shrill.

Finally Andrew said, "Your

granddaughter has confessed to the murder of Robert Atlee."

"Yes," said the old man.

"She was walking, she says, along the beach in front of the Sinbad when he approached her. They spoke. He asked her to his room. She went. He told her who he was. He was bragging, she says. He told her that he and Mayani had separated, Mayani leaving the gold with him. That he had taken the gold into the south and finally escaped, by freighter, to the United States. He told her he had wanted to see Africa one more time."

The old man had not looked at him, had not moved. He might have been sitting alone, there in the lengthening velvet shadows of his garden.

"And then," said Andrew, "he attempted to assault her. A powerful man, he subdued her easily. He removed his clothes. As he approached, she saw the knife on the nightstand, grabbed it, and used it. Then she left."

The old man said nothing.

Andrew said, "None of this is true, *m'zee*."

The old man frowned. He turned to Andrew.

Andrew said, "I spoke today with Elizabeth Harrambee, the matron at Uhuru Hospital. She was a nurse here during The Troubles. It was she who told Ronald Nu, thirty years ago,

about seeing Mayani near your house. She knew not only Mayani, she knew Robert Atlee. Two days ago, she was on the same plane from the capital. She recognized him."

Eyes blank, the old man watched Andrew.

Andrew said, "After I spoke with her today, *m'zee*, she came here. She was seen doing so—I made inquiries."

Nothing from the old man.

"Your granddaughter is a nurse. It was as a nurse that she spent her exchange year in Sweden. Previous to that, she worked at Uhuru Hospital. I know this, *m'zee*, for I examined their records before coming here. I believe that she became friendly with Matron Harrambee."

Only the blank watchful stare.

Andrew shifted slightly in his chair. "*M'zee*, everyone knows that you are the only person left alive in all the Township who had any connection to Robert Atlee and Mayani. I believe that when the matron saw Robert Atlee on the airplane, she notified your granddaughter. Out of friendship, perhaps. Perhaps out of a sense of guilt for what she had done before."

Still nothing.

Andrew looked down at the ragged grass, darkening now as light seeped from the sky. He

looked up. "M'zee, so far as the police and the ministry are concerned, this case is closed. The gold is gone, Robert Atlee is dead, your granddaughter has confessed."

The old man watched.

Andrew took a deep breath and let it slowly out. "I would like to agree with this," he said.

Without moving, his face still without expression, the old man spoke. "What will happen to her? To Joanna?"

Andrew shrugged. "It is her word against the word of a dead man. He was a hero, yes, but the story of taking the gold will tarnish the legend. She removed her fingerprints from the knife and placed Atlee's on it. Not good, but she claims she was in panic. She is a local woman, and well-respected, and she confessed voluntarily. I expect that her story will be believed. At the very worst, manslaughter. Perhaps a year or two of jail. At the very worst. More likely, a suspended sentence. Assuming there is even a trial."

The old man nodded. He smiled. "Thank you, sergeant." He blinked once, twice, then turned to look off at his roses.

Andrew said, "Was it a fight? Between Robert Atlee and Mayani?"

The old man said nothing.

"I know Mayani was here

after the highjacking, m'zee. Elizabeth Harrambee saw him. And by your own account, Mayani told you that Ronald Nu tried to recruit him into the secret faction within the G.S.U. This took place, you said, only two weeks before his father and sister were murdered, on June 21, 1953."

Andrew tapped the book on his lap. "This is a history of The Troubles, m'zee. Your name is often mentioned. Your principles, your opposition to violence. In June of 1953, you made a public statement about the murders of Joseph and Rebecca Mayani. But you made it, m'zee, in Dar Es Salaam, in Tanzania. You spent the entire month of June in Tanzania, with the African Teachers' Union."

The old man said nothing.

Andrew said, "So Mayani could not have told you about Ronald Nu at that time. Nor could he have told you about it throughout the next year. All of his operations took place in the western part of the country. The closest he came to the Township was the capital, several hundreds of miles away. The only time he could have told you was when he had come back to the Township, and that could only have been *after* the highjacking."

The old man said nothing.

"It is possible, of course, that you traveled to the west to meet with him. But I think not, *m'zee*. You were a teacher, you had your classes here. Your family was here. You were involved with the union."

Still staring at his roses, the old man smiled faintly. "David Obutu said you were a clever boy, sergeant. You've grown into a clever policeman."

Andrew shook his head. "For the time being, *m'zee*, I am neither a policeman nor an agent of the ministry. Nothing said here has been said officially."

Silence from the old man.

Andrew said, "It was a fight, *m'zee*?"

For a moment Andrew thought he would get no answer. Then, at last, without turning to him, the old man said, "Yes."

"Here? At your house?"

"Here. In this garden." His voice empty of emotion. "The two of them had managed to slip past the roadblocks. They stayed the night, hidden in the crawl space under the house. My son disposed of their horses. They fought early the next morning."

"They fought over the gold," Andrew said.

Studying his roses, the old man nodded. "Abraham was wounded and weak. Atlee wanted to leave him and take

the gold. They struggled. Atlee struck him. I got Abraham's gun. I forced Atlee to leave. I gave him enough gold to leave the country. He swore he'd come back one day." Now the old man turned to face Andrew. "I sent my son with him, Joanna's uncle. To make certain he didn't return. They reached a freighter in the south. Before he went aboard, Atlee killed him. He strangled him."

This Andrew had not expected. He frowned. "I'm sorry, *m'zee*."

The old man nodded and looked away.

Andrew said, "Your granddaughter knew all this."

The old man nodded.

"When she learned Atlee had returned, she knew he had come for the gold."

The old man nodded.

"What did she tell Atlee? In his room?"

"That she was my granddaughter. That a friend of hers had recognized him. That she'd help him get the gold if he'd give her a portion of it."

"He believed this?"

A quick, faint, ironic smile. "Women were always Atlee's weakness. Women and greed."

"The knife was hers?"

A nod. "She brought it back from Sweden, hidden in her baggage. It was a toy, a joke."

"Did you know she planned

to do this, *m'zee?*"

"No. I knew nothing until this afternoon, when the Harrambee woman came."

"Why did she confess, *m'zee?*"

The old man turned to Andrew. "Harrambee was afraid that if you kept asking questions, sooner or later someone else would learn that she told Nu about Mayani. And afraid, too, that you'd learn she told Joanna about Atlee." Another quick faint smile. "A woman who never learned, in thirty years, the value of keeping silent. She'll never learn. Sooner or later she would've told someone about Joanna."

Andrew nodded.

The old man said, "And Joanna realized that the search for the gold would continue unless she persuaded the authorities that it no longer existed. There was only one way to do that."

He frowned. "What she did was wrong, sergeant. Killing Atlee."

Andrew nodded.

"All my life," the old man said, "I've believed that the ends never justify the means. That violence of any kind is evil. But Robert Atlee killed my son. I will not mourn the man."

Andrew nodded. The old man turned to his roses.

For a while then, neither spoke. Overhead, the sky had become the color of lead. Night

came quickly at that latitude.

Andrew said, "About the gold, *m'zee.*"

Slowly, the old man turned to him. "Do you care for gold, sergeant?" Only mild curiosity in his voice.

"Not this gold, *m'zee.*"

The old man smiled that faint smile. "You don't wish for a Mercedes? For a big new house? For the pleasures of wealth?"

"I have what I need," Andrew said. And realized, almost with a start, that this was true. Mary, the children. A house, a moped. And action figures into the bargain.

Another smile from the old man. "Wisdom is wealth."

Andrew shrugged stiffly, felt his face flush. With embarrassment, with pleasure.

He said, "Your granddaughter's last name is not yours. It will mean nothing to anyone in the ministry. But there is a possibility that Nu, or someone else, will make the connection. You might wish to consider this."

Eyes narrowed slightly, the old man stared at him for a long moment. Then gave him a single small nod. "I thank you, sergeant. Arrangements will be made."

He turned his back to his flowers. The silence grew. In the sky, stars were gleaming.

Andrew said, "You have done well with the gold, *m'zee.*"

The old man frowned. "I hope so, sergeant. I hope so. Difficult to say."

The quick smile again as he looked to Andrew. "Tell me, sergeant. After your father's death, after we left the money with your family, why didn't you return to the university?"

Andrew shrugged. "I knew that my brother would put the money to better use." He smiled. "And, to be honest, by then I had already determined to become a policeman." He nodded to the old man. "But I am pleased, now, on behalf of my family, to be able to thank you, *m'zee*."

"You're most welcome, sergeant. It was Joanna who left the money. My daughter let her

do it. That was her first time." A smile. "A twelve-year-old girl. She kept secrets well even then."

Andrew said, "She swore, in her confession, that Atlee told her Mayani had escaped to the west. To Zaire. That he still lives."

The old man nodded, smiled. "We need our legends, sergeant. All of us."

The two of them sat there in the shadows. The stars glittered in the violet sky with a hard white light above the cluster of rosebushes, a dim black form now, indistinct, shapeless as a cloud. A cloud that hovered, Andrew knew, above the plot of earth which for over thirty years had hid the gold, and the bones, of Mayani.

The Hamburger Mind

by Evelyn Payne

I took the matter up with Rhoda when the meat loaf appeared on my tray that night.

"This is the third time this week that you've served me ground meat in one form or another. I don't care for ground meat," I pointed out, trying to be as pleasant as possible. The memory of that phone call from Nellie still rankled, but I wasn't going to bring that up now.

Rhoda just stood there, her lower lip pushed out mulishly, her black eyes angry. Then she tossed her head, that absurd haystack hairdo of hers waving like a black balloon, and said, "Things are getting more expensive all the time, Tess. You don't realize it since you're not doing the buying. Hamburger is just as nutritious as—"

"I have plenty of money," I interrupted, "and I'm sure Harold gives you enough to run the house without being so parsimonious. Steaks and roasts aren't so easy for me to chew, but I like chicken, turkey, seafood. And no spaghetti. I'm particularly fond of lobster—"

She actually winced, and I remembered hearing how stingy

she had been even as a child, always hoarding her money and begging pennies from visitors; and then she married that no-good husband and had to scrimp and save for years and years. No wonder she thought in terms of hamburger. Her clothes were always neat and clean, but they were obviously old and sometimes darned. The only thing in the world she spent money on was that hairdo of hers. She went to the beauty shop every week and came back with it blacker than ever, teased and shellacked so that no single hair dared stray from its appointed place. It might have been a wig; at any rate, I don't think she ever combed it herself.

"I'll make out some menus, and Maria knows how I like things fixed, so you won't have to bother with anything except the actual buying," I said, glancing out the window at the side yard. "Oh, and another thing. The garden looks dreadful. Hasn't the gardener been coming lately?"

"Oh, he wanted to raise his prices, so I let him go," she said

casually. "We can't afford that much for a gardener."

"Of course we can," I snapped. "I'll take the matter up with Harold when he comes tomorrow."

She sniffed, the sniff suggesting that I was a gullible old fool and that Harold was probably robbing me blind. She didn't like him, although he was always very polite and nice to her. Perhaps she'd guessed that he had been opposed to my hiring her to run the house when I couldn't get around as well as I used to. But I'd felt sorry for my sister, who had had a mighty thin life, and I expect I'd been a little nostalgic about my only remaining relative (Harold is Tom's nephew, not mine). Of course that was silly because Rhoda is fifteen years younger than I, and I'd been married and gone from home before she even started school.

Well, Harold had been right. Nellie Blair had told me on the phone that morning that Rhoda was going around insinuating that I was getting senile, losing my marbles. Oh, Rhoda hadn't said anything—it had been a matter of head shakes and gestures and pursed lips. I could visualize it—in six months I'd learned how Rhoda operated. She never wasted a word when a gesture or an expression would do.

As for my losing my marbles, it just wasn't so. True, I can't remember as well as I used to, but at eighty-two one has to let some things go, and I'd just as soon forget about the present—it's dull and rather frightening. Much more interesting to remember the past, to filter out the warm, exciting, happy things and hold them close. Since I had pneumonia six months ago I haven't been able to manage the stairs even with my cane, so my days consist mostly of eating, taking the medicine Dr. Stanhope prescribes, reading, and watching TV. Of course I have occasional visitors and phone calls from old friends, and then there's Harold, who comes once a week. I really look forward to that.

I'm very fond of him, and he seems to return the sentiment. He takes care of my affairs and, most important, he still treats me as if I were an interesting person, one he really enjoys visiting with, not just an old nuisance. I gave him power of attorney right after Tom died ten years ago, so I don't have to worry about anything—except these little spells of confusion that come over me now and then. I suppose that's why Rhoda thinks I'm losing my mind. I break out in perspiration first, then everything gets confused and sometimes I fall. I guess I

must say some rather strange things because when I begin to clear up I notice that Rhoda's face is longer and more disapproving than ever—if that's possible—and Maria, who's cooked for me for eighteen years, pats my arm and says tenderly, "*Pobrecita, pobrecita.*" It hasn't happened very often, and otherwise, except for occasional lapses of memory, I'm in pretty good shape. I only use glasses for reading and I can hear as well as ever.

I don't know why Rhoda wants to make out that I'm getting senile. Maybe she thinks that somehow she can get hold of some of my money. I'm a rich woman. Tom made a lot and we never had any children. I'd have liked children, but it didn't happen and, after all, I had Tom, who made up for everything.

Thursday afternoon Harold came as usual. He's always prompt, the dear boy. Of course he's not a boy any more except to someone my age. He's fifty if he's a day; still handsome, but a lot fatter than he used to be and beginning to gray a little at the temples. He's always very carefully dressed, and he smokes far too many cigars, cutting the ends off with a little gold cutter I gave him once for Christmas. I tease him sometimes about not being up to the minute—mod, I think they call

it—and he always laughs and admits that he's a square from way back. "If I have to go barefoot and dirty and wear my hair like a King Charles spaniel, why then I'm content to be out of fashion," he says comfortably.

He climbed the long marble stairs to the second floor and came into my room, puffing a little. He leaned over and kissed my cheek.

"How are you, Aunt Tess? Still as pretty as ever. You look younger than most of my contemporaries," he said flatteringly.

"It's good to see you, Harold. I always look forward to Thursdays," I said, patting his arm.

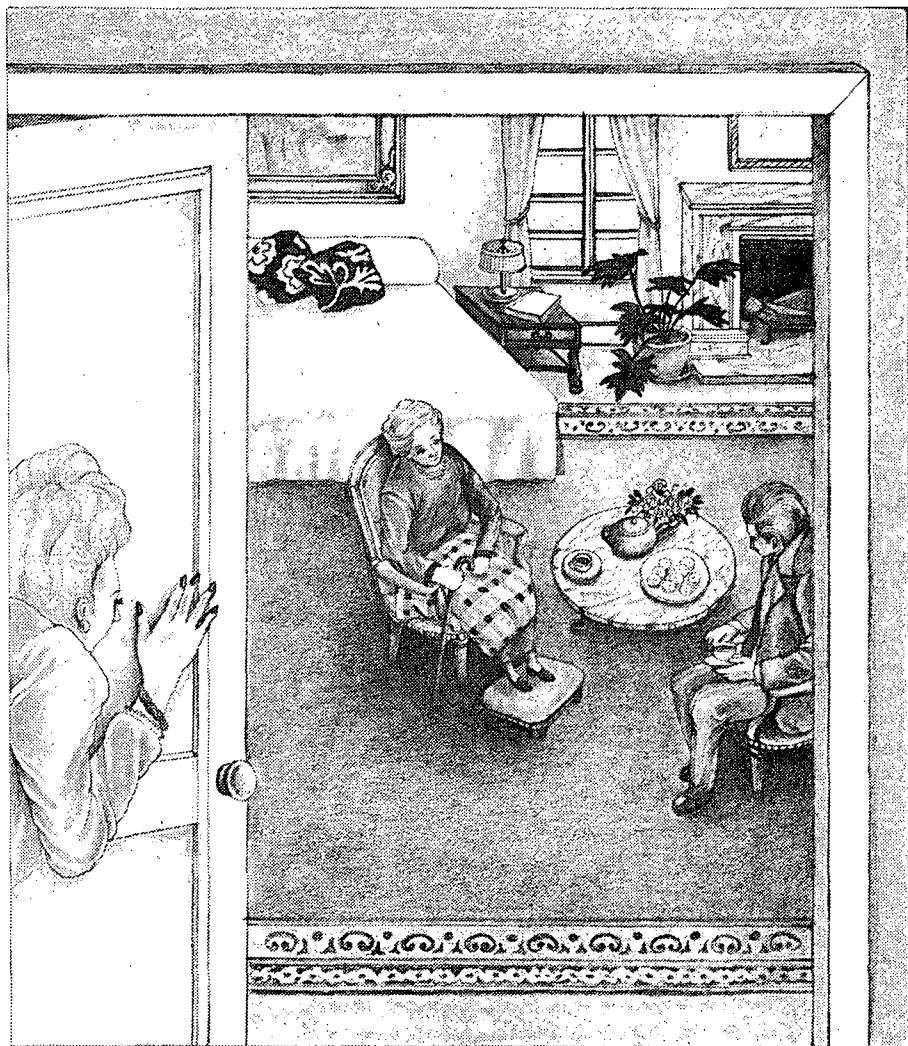
"Are you feeling all right?" he asked, sitting down at the table and putting his briefcase down.

"Oh, I'm fine, just fine."

"Now, you come sit over here by me at the table," he went on, helping me to a chair and seating me.

I like these little attentions from men. That's where I think these women's lib people are wrong. What's the matter with a little politeness between the sexes? It does grease the wheels of communication, I think. Unless, of course, your idea of communication is yelling at each other.

I got out an ashtray from the



"NOW, AUNT TESS, I THOUGHT IT ADVISABLE TO GET RID OF YOUR MER-
RIWELL STOCK AND PUT THE MONEY INTO BONDS."

table drawer, and he opened the briefcase and took out some papers.

"Now, Aunt Tess, I thought it advisable to get rid of your Merriwell stock and put the money into bonds. There have been some rather disturbing rumors about Merriwell lately and I thought it better to be on the safe side. Oh, I realized a nice profit for you—Tom bought them so long ago," he explained, and then launched into a disquisition on the market in general and Merriwell in particular.

He's nice about pretending that I understand what it's all about, and I listen intently and try to ask a few reasonably intelligent questions. I trust him implicitly, but even if he were robbing me, as Rhoda implies, I wouldn't really care. Most of it is going to be his one of these days, and I know he'll keep me living in the way I prefer as long as possible. He even offered me a home with him and his wife, who's a dear too, right after Tom died, but I wouldn't consent to that. This is my house and I intend to stay here as long as I can.

When he had finished with that and returned the papers to the briefcase, I said, "I want to talk to you about Rhoda. You were right and I was wrong."

He listened attentively while

I told him about the hamburger and the gardener, and then he exclaimed, "But that's absurd. I give her five hundred dollars a month to run this house. I'll talk to her."

I mentioned her implication that he was mishandling my money and he simply laughed, but when I got around to the phone call from Nellie he was furious.

"I'll fire her right now, the b—I'm sorry, Aunt Tess, but—" He stood up and then sat down again. "No, it would be better to send her a letter from the office, enclosing a final check. I suppose she's overhearing all this," he added, glancing at the open door, "but no matter. In the meantime, I'll check on that other woman who applied for the position as housekeeper. She sounded pretty good to me."

"I'll go by your recommendation this time," I said meekly. "But I never thought that a sister of mine—"

"She has a small mind, thinks of nothing but money, a—a hamburger mind, you might say. Because she's a penny-pincher and a cheat herself, she thinks everyone else is, too. But enough of that. I brought those pictures of the grandchildren with me today," he said, pulling some snapshots out of his pocket.

They were darlings, those two little boys. We had a nice

talk about the family and Tom. Harold is practically the only one I can talk to about Tom these days.

Finally he looked at his watch and rose. It was getting close to five and there were shadows coming into the corners. He picked up the ashtray and took it into the bathroom to empty it. When he came out he left the mirrored door ajar.

"Much as I've enjoyed this, Aunt Tess, I have to leave. Have to go home and dress for a charity dinner."

"You do too much of that civic work. You should take it easier," I said, handing him his hat.

"I know, I know. Next year I'm going to take it easier, say no to some of these jobs. In the meantime, though, I have to finish what I started." He bent over and kissed my cheek. "See you next Thursday. First thing tomorrow morning I'll attend to her," he added, jerking his head in the direction of Rhoda's bedroom.

He walked out, and I lay back in my chair and shut my eyes. Visitors do tire me, much as I enjoy them. I wasn't even up to walking over to shut the bathroom door, although I'm usually pretty particular about such things. Then I heard the door of Rhoda's room open—you can't fool me about any of the sounds

of this house, I've lived here too long—but I heard no footsteps, which was odd because she walks loudly, on her heels. I opened my eyes and looked into the mirror on the bathroom door, which reflected the hall. She was tiptoeing toward the stairs. I sat up then and watched. What was she up to now?

Harold had stopped at the top of the staircase and taken out a cigar and the little gold cutter, and then suddenly Rhoda was behind him, pushing at his back with all her strength. His arms flew up, the briefcase dropping and the cigar flying through the air, and he fell. The sound of his scream and the thumping of his body down those stairs will stay in my ears forever. I heard the kitchen door open and Maria come running, screaming too. Then and only then, did Rhoda scream and rush down the stairs.

I got up, took my cane and went out into the hall and looked down. The two women were standing over Harold, and I could see from where I was that his neck was twisted peculiarly, and I knew he was dead. For a moment my heart seemed to stop beating. Then I heard Rhoda go to the phone and begin dialing. I moved closer and peeked over the balustrade. She was directly below me.

"Dr. Stanhope," she was say-

ing, "Harold MacDonald fell down the steps here at the house. I think he's dead. Will you come at once? Oh, I'm going to call the police, but it's Tess I'm worried about. You see, Harold didn't slip. Tess—well, poor thing, I guess she didn't know what she was doing. She gave him—I hate to say this—she pushed him."

It was as though someone had thrown ice water in my face. She was blaming me! For a second or two I could hardly think. I took a step forward and felt something under my foot. Absently, I reached down and picked it up. It was the tip of Harold's cigar. I stood there, holding the thing, and listened to her rattle on.

"Oh, I wasn't anywhere near or I'd have stopped her. I was just opening the door of my room. You'd better be prepared to take care of her. She's dangerous, out of her mind."

Oh, it was all very clear then. With Harold out of the way and me certified as a dangerous lunatic, Rhoda would get herself appointed my guardian and she'd have the money and the house all to herself. This was what she'd been aiming at all these months. I tried to think. I would have to fight, but what was there to fight with? Maria would be on my side, but she hadn't seen it happen. Besides,

her testimony would be disregarded because she was uneducated. Dr. Stanhope would be on my side too, probably, but he only saw me about once a month, and by the time Rhoda had further exaggerated the odd spells I had and had given a graphic description of what she had "seen," I'd be a dead duck. Maybe there were medical tests, but I didn't know, and I couldn't wait for that. I had to do something now. Then suddenly I had an idea—not a very good one, perhaps, but something.

Rhoda was still on the phone, talking to the police this time. I leaned over the balcony and dropped the cigar end down. As I'd hoped, it landed on top of her hair. She didn't seem to notice it, thank goodness. I tiptoed back into my room and lay down on the bed. I didn't weep—I had used up all my tears when Tom died—but there was a vast hurt inside me, and a terrible fear.

Maria came rushing up the stairs. "Oh, señora," she cried, gathering me into her arms and rocking me a little, as one comforts a sick child. "I hear her. And I know it is not true. You do not kill him! *Nunca!*"

"I know, and we'll prove it somehow, Maria," I said, heartened by her love. "There, there's

the doorbell. That will be the doctor. And I hear sirens."

I lay up there waiting. I couldn't hear what was being said, but no doubt Rhoda was giving a full account. Then I heard them coming up the stairs. I got up off the bed and stood, leaning on my cane.

Dr. Stanhope came to my side, anger and sympathy commingled in his expression. He took my pulse, looked at me sharply, and demanded, "Are you all right, Tess?"

I nodded and he said bluntly, "Tess, Rhoda says you pushed Harold down the stairs. Is that true?"

I was equally blunt. "She's lying. She did it herself. Crept up behind him and pushed. That mirror was just that way—I was sitting in that chair and I could see the hall and the top of the steps. I watched her do it."

The chief of police, Oliver Smith, looked doubtful. Rhoda belonged to his church and no doubt he was aware of her little insinuations about my sanity. Finally he said, "Perhaps we'd better call Rhoda up here."

She came up and sat herself down in the chair farthest away from me, trying to look afraid.

I said coldly, "Don't make such a play of being afraid of me, Rhoda. I won't hurt you

even though you've lied about me."

She straightened up. "You did it. I saw you with my own eyes. I've been afraid of you for a long time. You're nuts. A lot of old people get that way."

I turned to the chief. "I'll tell you what happened this afternoon." I went through what I'd told Harold about the hamburger and the gardener, and Maria suddenly interrupted, "She no pay me what the señora did. I only stay because I love the señora and I am afraid of what this *malcriada* do to her."

"Rhoda probably overheard what we said. The door was open," I went on. "And I told Harold that I had had a phone call from Nellie Blair yesterday morning, and she told me that Rhoda was intimating that I was losing my mind."

"I never said a word," Rhoda said indignantly. "Besides, you didn't have a phone call yesterday morning."

"Oh, yes, I did. Nell called while you were in town marketing. Anyway, Harold was furious about that. He got up and started to go fire her right then, but finally he decided to send her a letter of dismissal and a final check from the office in the morning. So she crept up behind him and pushed."

"Why, you lying devil!" she screamed at me. "I wasn't any-

where near when he fell. I was at the door of my room and that's a good twenty feet away."

"Then what's that in your hair?" I asked, moving closer to her. "It looks like the end of a cigar. Harold's cigar. If you were so far away, how did it get into your hair?"

She yelped and started to reach up, but the doctor grabbed her arm. "Look at it, chief. It does look like a cigar end."

Very carefully the chief picked it out of her hair. "Hell, that's what it is, all right."

"It isn't, it can't be," she cried. "I wasn't anywhere near him. You put it there, Tess. You must have."

"I wasn't anywhere near you until five minutes ago when you came into this room. Maria can testify to that," I pointed out coldly.

Maria nodded vigorously. "The señora stay up here. The other one," there was infinite scorn in her voice, "stay downstairs."

"Then it must have flown back and hit my hair," Rhoda insisted desperately.

"The cigar was at the top of the stairs, the cutter a few steps farther down," Oliver Smith said. "That cigar end wouldn't have gone very far. Too light."

"Maybe you'd better check

into her bank account," I went on. "She's been getting two hundred and fifty dollars a month salary and five hundred a month to run the house on. She bought the cheapest food, fired the gardener, reduced Maria's pay. Where did the money go?"

Oliver Smith nodded. "Yeah, that's a point. What'd you do with it, Rhoda?"

She looked around at the doctor, who looked furious, and then at the chief, who looked highly doubtful, and began to whimper. "If you only knew what it is to be poor, really poor, dirt poor. And there she is with all that money and nothing to do but sit around and be waited on. I was only trying to lay up something for my old age. And then Harold was going to fire me and I'd be poor again. I had to kill him, I *had* to."

They've all gone now. The doctor gave me a shot, and the chief apologized for something—perhaps for believing Rhoda's innuendos. Maria has gone to make me a cup of tea, and Harold has gone forever. I'm all alone, and the perspiration is beginning to break out on my forehead. Maybe this will be a good one, one from which I'll never recover.

Fingering a Killer

by Malcolm McClintick

The house was one of those newly restored Victorian things, sort of like in San Francisco, except that it wasn't. San Francisco, much to Allen Ross's chagrin; it was Indianapolis, in a downtown area called Lockerbie Square. Yuppies and other upwardly mobile people came here, bought homes, and lived in modest luxury amid the surrounding rundown warehouses, bars, loan companies, and storefront law offices. They could walk to work, smile knowingly at one another, and pretend to be the cream of a real city.

The dead man lay on his back on the bathroom floor of his Victorian house. His name was Phil Hendrix, single, late thirties, owner of a small nearby loan company called E-Z-Cash Finance. He was heavy, over six feet, dark hair, wearing blue boxer shorts and a blue terrycloth robe. The left side of his neck and face was still covered with the dried remains of shaving cream; the other side was smooth. The stubble of unshaven beard poked through the cream. He looked physi-

cally fit, except for the fact that he was dead.

The blue robe lay open, revealing three ugly bullet wounds: one in the left shoulder, one in the middle of the bulging stomach, and one just to the left of the breastbone.

Allen Ross, of the prosecuting attorney's office, stood in the bathroom pushing his horn-rims up on his nose and looking down at the dead man. He had been sent by his boss to work with the Indianapolis cops on the homicide investigation because the victim had telephoned the prosecutor the day before with information. Ross shook his head. Obviously, the phone call had led to the man's death.

It was nine fifteen on a Tuesday morning in mid-January, dry and frigid outside, temperature hovering in the twenties. The victim's Victorian house was pleasant, maybe even a bit warm, except for here in the bathroom where a small window—too small for anyone to get in or out—was open several inches, letting in the cold.

Shivering, Ross glanced up to

see the city detective in charge of the case standing in the bathroom doorway, Sergeant Sam Vincent, a tall, skinny, fiftyish guy in a brown wool suit and brown overcoat, narrow face, balding on top.

"How's it going?" Vincent wanted to know.

"Not bad." Ross smiled. "You solve it yet, Sam?"

"Oh, sure. I just got out my mail-order detective kit, looked through my magnifying glass, and snapped my fingers." Sam Vincent grinned wryly. "Actually, it *is* pretty much open and shut, ain't it?"

"Sure." Ross glanced at the corpse. "Did you notice he's holding a bar of bath soap in his left hand, Sam?"

Vincent nodded. "Yeah, we ain't exactly dumb in Homicide, whatever you legal eagles think. I noticed the bar of soap."

"He was shaving," Ross pointed out. "Half of his face still has shaving cream and whiskers. He was using shaving cream from a can, not bath soap."

"So? Maybe he liked to wash his hands."

"In the middle of a shave?" Ross asked, then stepped out into the hall so an Indianapolis *Star* photographer could get by. The crime lab people had finished already. Basically they were waiting for the coroner's man to release the body.

"Look," Sam Vincent said, "it's simple. He's been shot three times, see? Doc says one got him right in the heart, one in the gut, one in the shoulder. Big caliber, probably at least a .38. Three exit wounds. Three slugs in the wall behind him, where they came out. No shells on the floor, so probably it was a revolver. Rear door of the house was kicked in, ripped the lock right out of the wood. Bathroom door's been kicked in, somebody's foot right under the doorknob. It was locked, but just one of those flimsy things with a push button in the knob. So, here's the picture. Killer broke in the back door and came here. Hendrix is shaving with the door locked. Killer kicks in the door. Killer lets Hendrix have it three times with a revolver. Hendrix falls on the floor and dies. Killer goes out the back door and makes his getaway. Only thing we don't know is, who the killer was."

"Footprints on the door that was kicked in?" Ross asked.

"Just a faint dirty mark, nothing to go on. Nothing outside—all the walks around here are bone dry. No fingerprints, either."

"I don't understand why Hendrix was gripping that bar of soap," Ross said. "I'll tell you something, though. It was one of four guys."

Sam Vincent smiled vaguely. "Now we're getting someplace. I didn't figure your boss sent you over here just to annoy me and my boys. What four guys?"

"Hendrix telephoned our office yesterday," Ross said. "Hendrix manages the E-Z-Cash Finance Company, just over in the next block. He's got four loan officers working under him. It's a fairly small outfit. Hendrix said yesterday that one of the four had been extorting sex from female clients."

"Huh?"

Ross nodded. "Yeah. Apparently this guy would tell some young attractive female who was in hock up to her ears that he'd take care of some or all of her indebtedness for her, in return for certain, uh, favors."

He saw Vincent frown. "Creep. So, then it is open and shut. Why didn't you tell me this before, Ross? Which guy is it?"

Allen Ross got out a cigarette, then realized he shouldn't smoke on the crime scene and put it back in the pack. "Well, that's the problem," he said. "Hendrix didn't tell us yesterday on the phone which guy it was. We set up a meeting with him for ten o'clock this morning, and he was going to tell us then."

"Damn it. So, you don't have any idea at all?"

"No."

Vincent considered this. Then he turned to one of the uniformed cops. "Hey, Sid? Get a car over to the E-Z-Cash Finance Company and round up all four loan officers. Bring 'em down here. Okay?"

The cop nodded. "Right, sarge."

"Any of 'em not in the office, find 'em and bring 'em anyway," Vincent added.

The cop nodded again and was gone.

Allen Ross thought about the four loan officers and the sex extortion racket and the bar of soap and the three bullets and the kicked-in doors, and went outside onto the front porch to pull his overcoat collar up and smoke his cigarette. The body was taken out in a bag by the coroner's deputies, loaded into the back of a van, and driven away. Three bullet holes. Rear door kicked in, bathroom door kicked in. Ross visualized what had probably happened.

When Allen Ross got up in the morning and shaved, he didn't lock his bathroom door. Why should he? Nobody was coming to blow him away. So why had Hendrix locked his bathroom door? It didn't make sense, unless . . .

Ross pictured Hendrix in there shaving. Then he tossed his cigarette into the frozen yard and reentered the house, immediately fogging up the

lenses of his horn-rims. "Drat," he muttered, took his glasses off, and wiped at the lenses with a handkerchief. When he could see again, he plodded down the hall to the bathroom and looked inside.

The blood was still on the floor where it had flowed from the exit wounds in Hendrix's back. Ross could see the holes in the plaster wall where the three slugs had buried themselves. The small window was still partly open, letting in cold air from an unpaved alley. Ross turned and called to Sam Vincent, who was pacing back and forth in a formal dining room off the hall.

"Hey, Sam?"

The cop stopped pacing and came out into the hall to stand at the open bathroom door.

"Yeah?"

"Was this window open when you guys got here?"

"Sure was. Hendrix must've been a fresh-air nut. But I hope you're not trying to make something of the temperature. He hasn't been dead long enough to make the cold a problem for the time of death determination. Besides which, we've got a neighbor who heard all three shots and called the cops."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Ross said absently. He looked at himself in the shaving mirror and took out a comb, ran it through his thin black hair.

There wasn't a lot left on top now, and he was only forty or so. After forty he'd stopped counting, but it hadn't been that long ago. Still not bad, though, he mused, checking his teeth—nice and straight—and the line of his jaw—no flab yet. But he didn't much like the gray at the temples.

"Admiring yourself?" Vincent asked with a sneer. "You ain't that beautiful."

"It's getting thin on top," Ross said.

Vincent laughed. "I ain't had hair on top in ten years. Welcome to the club."

Ross followed Vincent back into the dining room just as the uniformed cop returned, ushering in four men who frowned or looked worried or, in one case, politely smiled.

"Sergeant Vincent? These are the loan officers."

Ross appraised them as the cop said their names.

"James Neal." A short, thirtyish, blond guy, tan suit, tan overcoat, polished shoes, pale complexion, pale blue eyes. Frowning hard, indignantly. Pompous, Ross decided. Arrogant.

"This is Tony DeVoss." A big, heavysset, dark-haired guy, black shifting eyes, large beak nose, clean-shaven but with a shadow already appearing in the area of his beard, thick black eyebrows. DeVoss was

also scowling, looking angry, his big heavy fists clenched at his sides.

"Bill McCready." The polite smiler. Ross decided McCready was eager to please. About six feet, late twenties, bland, fair, aviator-styled glasses, flashy sport coat, loud tie. Ross could smell McCready's cologne. There were four guys standing there, but it had to be McCready's.

"And Frank Keller." This was the scared-looking guy. Short, plump, in his twenties, a little stubbly reddish mustache, short red hair, boyish features, dark eyes darting all around. Afraid of—what? Being charged with murder?

Sam Vincent said gruffly, "I'm sorry to drag you gentlemen down here, but your boss, Phil Hendrix, was shot to death earlier this morning. I suppose you've already been informed?"

They all nodded. Tony DeVoss said loudly, "So what? Are you arresting us or something? How come we gotta get pulled down here?"

"We have reason to believe," Vincent said, "that Hendrix was shot by somebody in his office. Which is to say, *your* office. So we'd like to ask you all a few questions."

"That's bull," DeVoss said, scowling harder.

"I don't know anything," Frank Keller stammered, glancing around nervously.

McCready, polite and flashy, just smiled and said nothing. Next to him, Neal remained arrogant and indignant. "This is highly irregular," he said. "We're executives."

Allen Ross hid a smile. Executives. Loan officers. Strange world, he thought. Executives. He was trying to think. Something kept nagging at him. While Sam Vincent started questioning the four executives, Ross decided to go back out on the porch for another smoke, where he could be alone and do some figuring.

It was cold out there; the morning sun seemed weak and ineffectual. Down on the street a small car rumbled past, its tires singing on the dry pavement. Evidently it had just been started—its side and rear windows were all fogged up. Ross had once owned a little Renault that had been hard to keep defrosted in winter.

A uniformed cop came out to join him, shuffling his black shoes and lighting a thin cigar. "How's it going, Allen?"

Ross nodded. "Not bad. The sergeant getting anything yet? A confession?"

The cop grinned. "Naw. He won't, neither. Nothing to go on. Unless one of those birds owns a .38. Too bad we don't actually know which one did it, we could maybe try for a search warrant, look for the gun. But

with four suspects we'd be fishing, I doubt we'd get a warrant. Hell, you're a prosecutor. Am I wrong?"

Allen Ross shook his head. "You're not wrong. It'd be tough."

"Weird case, though," the cop said, puffing at his cigar. "Guy shaves in a locked bathroom, then gets plugged holding onto a bar of soap. I asked my partner, what was Hendrix going to do with that bar of soap? Hit the killer with it? Some weapon. If it was me, I'd at least have gone at him with my razor."

Ross took off his glasses and wiped at them again with his handkerchief. "Darn things keep fogging up when I go inside," he said. "Hendrix must have a humidifier."

The cop nodded. "Yeah. You know, another weird thing. Hendrix had a chip of soap under one of his fingers, the index finger on the other hand. He must've really been hanging on to that soap bar for dear life. Hey, speaking of soap, you know what my wife does with her glasses? You can buy that gunk to spray 'em with, you know, keep 'em from fogging up? But she smears a little soap on the lenses, works just like that gunk you can buy. Maybe you oughta try it."

Ross thought for a time, then smiled at the cop. "Thanks. Maybe I will."

He'd just solved the case.

He went back inside the house and his horn-rims fogged up again. Taking them off and wiping the lenses with his handkerchief, he went down the hall and found Sam Vincent in the dining room with the four suspects. Vincent glanced up.

"Hello," Ross said pleasantly, putting his glasses back on. "Anything yet?"

"Nobody's confessed to shooting Hendrix, if that's what you mean," Vincent replied dryly.

"I'm going to use the bathroom," Ross said. "It's okay, isn't it?"

"That's a crime scene," Vincent said irritably. "Use someplace else, can't you?"

"I'll be out in a minute," Ross told him, and entered the bathroom.

He pushed the door shut. The killer had kicked it in, so it would no longer lock, but it stayed almost closed. Ross went over to the small window and shut it. There was a toilet, a sink and shaving mirror, shelves crammed with the usual stuff—aftershave, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, Band-aids, good quality towels and washcloths. Hendrix's disposable razor lay on the sink. There was an old fashioned tub with feet, and a white plastic shower curtain.

Ross reached down and turned on the shower, all the way over to HOT, as hard as it would run.

He stepped to the sink and turned the hot water tap full on. Then he stood there, waiting.

The cop's wife had a good idea, Ross thought. He pulled a tissue from a box on the back of the toilet and used it to wipe some soap onto his glasses lenses. As the bathroom gradually filled with steam, the shaving mirror over the sink began fogging over but his glasses remained clear.

Ross stood there for a while, smiling and humming a little tune and looking at himself in the mirror. With all the fog on the glass he couldn't see much. He combed his thinning hair once, then gave up. I'll be bald before I'm fifty, he thought.

After a time he turned off the sink faucet and the shower. Someone rapped hard at the door and Sam Vincent's voice came loudly:

"Ross? What the hell you doing in there?"

"Come in," Ross said, opening the door. "Quickly," he added.

Vincent came in, and Ross shut the door behind him.

"What's going on?" the detective asked. "What the hell you doing in here—taking a bath?"

Ross smiled. "How's it going out there? Figure it out, yet?"

Vincent shook his head, frowning. "No. Geez, why've you got it all steamed up in here. You nuts? Out there, it's

rotten. Not one guy has an alibi. Three of 'em own guns, two of 'em have revolvers. All four of 'em disliked Hendrix for one reason or another. They all four got to the loan office within twenty minutes of the time of the shooting and did paperwork in their own little cubicles. Any one of the four could've sneaked out, walked a block, kicked in the back door, come in and shot Hendrix, and beat it back to the loan company again, maybe tossing the gun in a trash barrel on the way. My men are searching the alleys now. I'm gonna have to start interviewing all their female clients to get any lead at all. This is gonna take forever."

"Maybe not." Ross pointed at the mirror. "There's your murderer," he said.

Vincent stared, blinking in the steam-filled room.

"You do that, Ross?"

"Not me. Hendrix. Before he died."

"How?"

Ross said, "Hendrix is in here shaving. If he steams up the mirror he can't see to shave, so he opens that window. It's cool and airy, the mirror doesn't fog over. Right?"

Vincent nodded.

Ross continued. "The killer kicks in the back door. Hendrix hears it. Hendrix already knows he's going downtown today to talk to us and put the finger on

an extortionist. Maybe the extortionist overheard Hendrix on the phone or found out about it in some way. Hendrix is half-way through shaving. He looks out and sees the killer, the extortionist, coming for him, holding a gun. Hendrix knows he's about to be shot. He locks the bathroom door, but it's a flimsy lock and a flimsy door. He doesn't have a chance. What's he do?"

"You tell me," Vincent said.

"He decides that if he's going to get shot, he'll at least name his killer. The name of the extortionist and killer. He grabs the bar of soap, the one you found in his left hand. He jabs the end of his right index finger against it, getting soap under his fingernail. He writes the killer's name in soap, on the shaving mirror. When the killer breaks in, he won't see it—there's no steam in the room, and it's not really visible on the glass unless you get very close and peer. And probably the killer fired from the doorway and never even saw the mirror.

"The killer kicks in the door and fires. Hendrix goes down, holding the bar of soap. If anybody steams up the room, the mirror will fog over—all except for the soap. The killer's name."

Vincent scratched his head. "That was a long shot, wasn't it? How'd he know anybody'd

bother steaming up the bathroom?"

"I guess he just hoped."

"Maybe now we can get a search warrant and look for the gun," Vincent said. He looked at the mirror again.

In the fog on the glass, a name stood out in large dripping letters.

NEAL.

They left the room. A uniformed cop was watching the four loan officers in the dining room. They were all drinking coffee.

Vincent looked at them. "All right, Mr. Neal," he said. "You're under arrest on suspicion of murder. You have the right to remain silent . . ."

The short blond guy in the tan suit and polished shoes stared at Sergeant Vincent. His pale blue eyes widened. Then the arrogance left, leaving only fear and desperation.

"Like *hell*," Neal snapped, and bolted for the hall. But of course there were other cops out there, and he didn't get far. When they had subdued him and pulled him back into the dining room, Neal glowered sullenly at Vincent.

"How'd you know? Just tell me that."

Vincent said, "It was Mr. Ross here. He saw the handwriting on the wall. Or rather, on the mirror."

The Alias

by Lawton O'Connor

“If I were to commit a crime,” said Mr. Nelson West over the bridge table that evening, “it would be for money, and only for money. But I would have the good sense to leave most of the money untouched afterwards.”

“Then what is the point,” his wife said, “in stealing it at all?”

“Ah,” West said. “If you steal enough to begin with, you can use just a small portion of the money and still have enough to have made the crime worthwhile. The trouble with these big bank and payroll robberies is the robbers always become greedy afterwards. They’re not content to spend just the used bills. They have to spend the new bills too, and that way they get caught. Greed.” He shook his head.

Mr. George Simpson, proprietor of the Greater Arizona Realty Company, played a low club from the dummy. “I’ve always thought,” he said, “that one of the reasons they get caught is there’s more than one of them in on the robbery. The police catch one, he tells on the others; or they get mad at each other; or whatever.”

“That’s another thing,” West said. “The crime must be executed by one man. Never trust anyone.”

“But one man alone can’t steal a lot of money,” Simpson said. “It takes timing and planning and somebody to drive the car and so on and so forth.”

“True,” West said.

“Well,” Simpson said with a laugh, putting up a trump from his own hand, “all I can say for you, Nelson, is I’m glad you work for me. By your own definition, you’ll never commit a crime.”

If it had not been for Mr. Hathaway, Simpson would have been right about West. Mr. Hathaway just happened. He came along out of the blue at a time when Nelson West, himself new to Arizona, had been working for Simpson’s Greater Arizona Realty Company, as a sales agent, for no more than four months.

Simpson called West into his inner office. “There’s a guy named Hathaway waiting outside. Take the keys to the Ford place out in the desert and see if you can sell it to him.”

"That deserted monstrosity?" West said. "You couldn't give it away."

"This is one nut who just might buy it," Simpson said. "I've been talking to him. He's an eccentric. Wanted to know the name of a good bank out here, and when I told him, he asked me for the name of *another* good bank. He's out here from the East. Rich old guy. No relatives, no ties. Wants to be away by himself."

West shrugged and went outside and met Mr. Hathaway. Then the two of them got into West's car and started east, toward the desert.

"I want to stop at a bank first," Hathaway said. "I'm carrying a lot of money around with me."

"Mr. Simpson said you were interested in relocating here," West said. "It's certainly marvelous country."

"I'm interested in more than one bank," Hathaway said. "Two hundred thousand dollars is too much to put in any one bank."

West swallowed. "Well," he said, "the thing to do is get it into one bank for now. There's one in Mesa that has branches all over the state. So we can stop there, and later—tomorrow or the next day—you can transfer some of it. This way you know it'll be safe. Won't have to carry it around with you."

He drove Hathaway to the bank in Mesa, and while Hathaway was inside, he went down the street to a large sporting goods store and bought some bullets and five one-gallon jugs of muriatic acid, which is commonly used for cleaning and regulating swimming pools. He placed these articles in the trunk of his car and was sitting at the wheel when Mr. Hathaway came out of the bank.

"Now let's see that Ford place."

West nodded, and they drove a good distance into the desert.

"They were very nice at the bank," Hathaway said. "I told them I wouldn't be using the money till they had cleared my cashier's check back east, but that as soon as possible I wanted to transfer some of it to another bank. They said they understood."

"Good," West said. He turned onto a road that was hardly a road at all, leading to a scrubby ridge of hills.

"Nobody around for miles, is there?" Hathaway said.

"You want privacy, here it is."

"I should think you'd be afraid driving this wasteland by yourself."

"We all carry guns in the glove compartment," the real estate agent said. He reached over and opened the glove com-

partment. "See?" He took out the gun and showed it to Hathaway, then drew back a little and shot the other man twice.

The road led among the deserted cave formations on the narrow sides and declivities of the upland. West stopped the car and dragged the body of the dead man to a particularly inverted formation of rock. Then he went back to the car and got the acid, and when he was finished with his work there was no recognizing Mr. Hathaway—not now and not, certainly, at any future date when someone might stumble across Mr. Hathaway. The odds were about a hundred to one that anybody ever would.

Then West took the labels off the acid jugs and burned them, and then smashed the jugs themselves on a plateau of rock nearby. Finally, he replaced the used bullets in the gun, put it back in the glove compartment, and drove home.

Rather than try to get rid of any of the contents of Hathaway's pockets, he took them all home with him. That night, he suggested to his wife that she visit her mother in California, something his wife had been talking of doing for some time. She agreed to leave the following day.

He saw his wife off on the plane the next morning, then

purchased some plain stationery and envelopes at the airport counter and went to a telephone and called Mr. Simpson.

"I think I've got that twenty-four-hour virus," he said. "I'd better not come in till tomorrow."

"Take care of yourself," Simpson said. "How did Hathaway like the Ford place?"

"Sounded interested, believe it or not," West said. "He's going to let us know."

When he had finished with his phone conversation, West drove home and took from his own suit the contents of Hathaway's pockets. There were several items of identification—a New York driver's license, Social Security card, and so forth. There was nothing to indicate that Hathaway had any connections of a personal nature in the East. He must have been telling the truth when he said he had no relatives, no ties.

There was a checkbook from the Mesa bank and a savings book as well, indicating that Hathaway had deposited a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars in the checking account and twenty-five thousand in the savings. For a time, West practiced imitating Hathaway's signature. Finally he got it down to his satisfaction.

Then he wrote out a check for three thousand dollars and made

it out to the Greater Arizona Realty Company. He signed Hathaway's name to the check, and on the border of the check wrote "Earnest Money on Ford Property." Then he put the check in an envelope, addressed the envelope to Mr. Simpson at the realty office, and went out and mailed it.

West was at his desk the next morning when Simpson came over with the check.

"That Hathaway's a real nut," Simpson said. "Here's a deposit on the property, but no note with it or anything. Where's he staying?"

"I don't know," West said. "I thought you knew." He shrugged. "Well, at least you've got his money. You'll be hearing from him." He paused. "If his check's any good. Anybody crazy enough to buy that Ford place would do anything."

"Well, suppose I just call the bank and find out if it's good," Simpson said.

"Good idea," West said.

He waited, and in a few minutes Simpson came back. "Good as gold," he said.

"Then we've made a sale," West said happily.

He waited until Simpson had come back from lunch before making the next move. Then he went into Simpson's office and said, "That fellow Hathaway called while you were out to

lunch. He's a nut, all right. Now he's leaving town for a few weeks, but he wanted to make sure we'd hold the house for him."

"So long as we've got his money," Simpson said, "I don't care what he does."

West had not yet, in the time he had lived in Arizona, been anywhere northwest of Phoenix. Now, however, he went to the Glendale branch of the bank in which Hathaway had opened his account. Here he identified himself as Hathaway, producing the bank books on the other branch as proof, and transferred eighty-five thousand dollars to the Glendale branch.

He did not touch any of this money. Instead, over the next two weeks, he drew several checks on the Mesa bank and cashed them at the Glendale bank.

When he had fifty thousand in cash, he stopped. There was still eighty-five thousand in the Glendale bank and sixty-two thousand in the Mesa bank.

At this point, West destroyed all the Hathaway bank books and other credentials. He would spend the money slowly and keep it hidden, never depositing it to his own bank account. For this purpose, he took out a safe deposit box at his own bank, into which he put most of the money.

If I were to commit a crime, he had said, it would be for money . . . most of the money would be left untouched . . . it would be done alone, for you never can trust anyone else . . .

Rules One, Two, and Three—it was as simple as that. Certainly, people would start asking questions about the missing Mr. Hathaway: Simpson at the office, and possibly the motel where Hathaway had been staying and which he'd used as his address when taking out his bank account. But no matter who investigated the matter, there was no linking the missing man to Nelson West. West was not even the last man to have seen Hathaway alive; the last man to have seen "Hathaway" was the teller at the Glendale bank. And there was no linking West with anything in Glendale. If there had been, it would have happened by now.

It was not, indeed, for a period of several more weeks before Simpson greeted him at his desk one morning and said, "What in tarnation ever happened to that fellow Hathaway?"

"Beats me," West said.

"Did you know he was a crook?"

"What?"

Simpson nodded. "Embezzler. Took two hundred grand, back east. That's why he was yelling about getting to a bank when he was here that day. Wanted to get cash as soon as he could. And the business about wanting a house away from everybody and telling you he'd left town and all that. Wanted to make sure his tracks were covered."

West blinked. "How'd you find all that out?"

"I've got two FBI guys in my office inside. They tracked him this far. You and I and a teller at a bank out in Glendale are the ones who saw him most recently. The teller's in my office too. Come in."

Nelson West stood up. "The teller can identify Hathaway?"

"Name wasn't Hathaway at all," Simpson nodded, leading the way into his office. "Alias. Real name was Gerson or something. Had phony credentials and everything . . ."

The only thing that had gone wrong with his rules for crime, West realized brokenly, was Rule Three . . . *you can never trust anyone else.*

Including, he amended it now, your victim.

The Nine Eels of Madame Wu

by Edward D. Hoch

Madame Wu's shop on a small street in East Bangkok was crowded with tourists that April afternoon and so she had to get the teenaged neighbor girl to watch the place while she went to the canal to release her eels. It was a ritual which had not varied in Madame Wu's life since the American, Sid Crawford, had moved in with her. That had been nearly ten years ago now, during those crumbling final years of the Vietnam War.

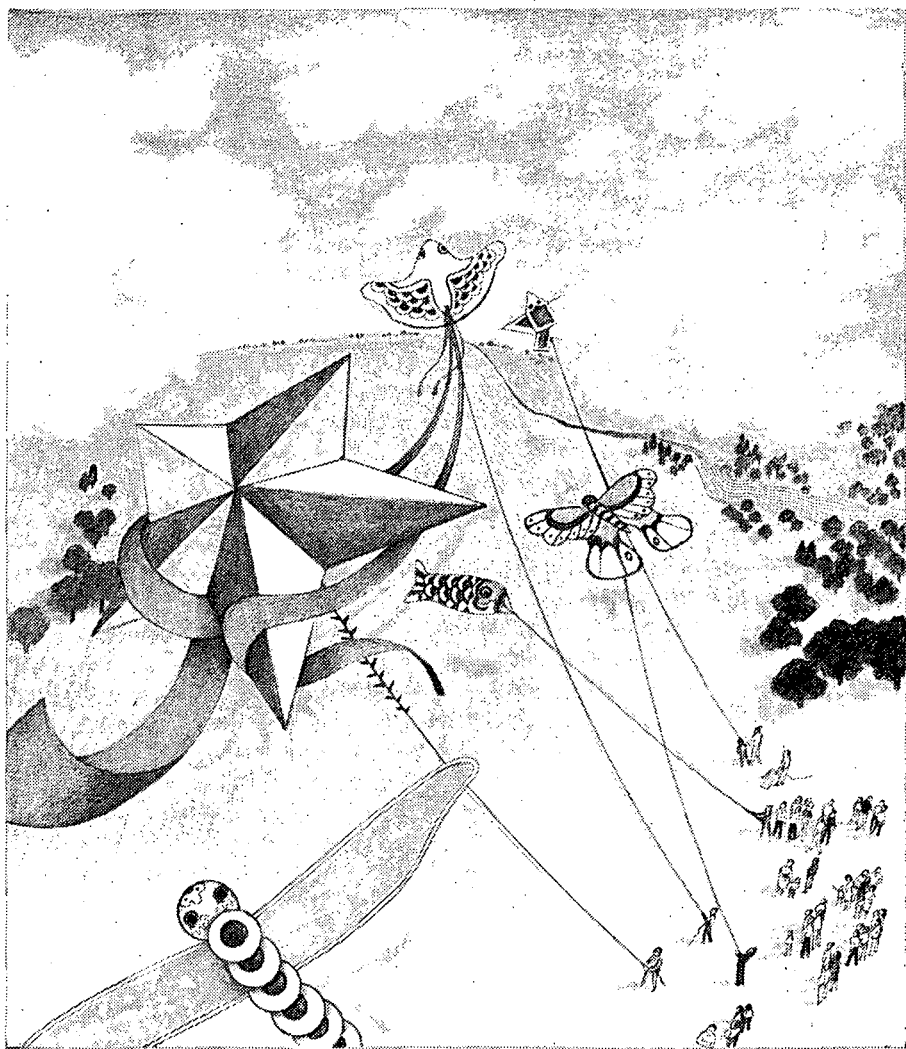
While Madame Wu tended her shop of Chinese curios, Crawford made his living from February to June of each year by engaging in the traditional Bangkok sport of kite fighting. The events were usually held in the early evenings at the Pramane Ground near the Grand Palace, where a strong southerly wind provided fuel for the sky battles. And on the afternoons before Crawford's especially important fights Madame Wu went to the Klong Maha Nak, the canal near her shop, to release the traditional eels. Nine was a lucky number in Thailand, and setting free that number of eels was considered to bring good fortune.

Madame Wu bought the eels in a water-filled plastic bag from a street urchin who sold them for that purpose. She often suspected he later recaptured some of the same eels from the canal to sell all over again, but that was not her concern. She was interested only in assuring Crawford's victory in the kite fight above the Pramane Ground.

She went to the lily-strewn waters of the canal alone and dumped the writhing mass of eels into it, watching them splash and swim away, darting through the dark masses of lily pads until they disappeared from view. Then she returned to the little apartment above her shop, where Crawford was putting the finishing touches on his kites.

"I have released the eels," she told him. "You will have good luck."

He looked up at her and smiled. He was a slim man now in his middle forties, with a streak of grey knifing through his otherwise black hair. The handsome American, they had called him when he



ON THESE SPRING EVENINGS WHEN THE SOUTH WIND BLEW STRONG
AND FREE THE PRAMANE GROUND WAS GIVEN OVER TO THE KITE
FIGHTS.

first came to Bangkok—but, if he was no longer quite so handsome, then neither was Madame Wu herself. They had both drifted uncertainly into middle age.

“I have little faith in your eels,” he admitted, “but if the ritual pleases you that’s enough. Will you be coming with me this evening?”

“Of course. I will close the shop early.”

“That is good, Anna,” he said, attaching another barb to the string of his star-shaped kite.

She had told him once how she came to be called Anna. Her Chinese parents, newly settled in Bangkok, had chosen to name her after Anna Leonowens, the Englishwoman who’d journeyed to Siam in 1862 to instruct the king’s many children. Crawford still called her that, though to the customers of her shop and the other merchants on the street she had long been Madame Wu.

No one ever used Crawford’s given name, either. When they arrived together at the Pramane Ground, a large open space just north of the Grand Palace, she heard several men calling out, “Crawford!” He waved each time but did not stop, walking through the gathering crowd of spectators with Madame Wu at his side, striding purposefully, like the champion he was.

The Pramane Ground was used regularly for events as diverse as weekend markets and royal cremations, and every May the king himself inaugurated the planting season by sponsoring a ploughing ceremony on the site. But on these spring evenings when the south wind blew strong and free it was given over to the kite fights.

Madame Wu could not remember now the sequence of events that had propelled Crawford to the forefront in the sport. It had started in a bar, certainly, as had so many events in her life. A drunken challenge, a large bet made in haste, and then they had gone across to the open space by the palace. She remembered only one thing about that first evening. She had tugged at Crawford’s sleeve and pointed across the street and said, “There is where Anna’s second house stood, when she was governess for the king’s children.”

The battle in the sky was waged between two kites—a five-foot-long “male” kite in the shape of a star with a thick barbed string, and a much smaller “female” kite with a thin unbarbed string but a long tail able to ensnare the points of the star kite. The star kite could tangle or cut the smaller kite’s string with its barbed cord

and win, or it could lose the battle by being dragged to the ground by the smaller kite.

That first evening, Crawford flew a small kite, and he took naturally to the sport, maneuvering his kite so skillfully that the star kite was pulled ignominiously to the ground. But in the years that followed he had become an expert at flying both types. Whenever there was a challenger with money to bet, Crawford took him on. Now he mainly flew the larger star kites, often cutting through an opponent's string in a matter of minutes.

On this night, in a contest important enough for Madame Wu to have freed nine eels, Crawford was being challenged by a Pakistani youth who'd built a solid reputation in the sport since his recent arrival in Bangkok. Already she could see that the betting was heavy, and Crawford himself had wagered a large amount of cash on the outcome. Spectators were lining up, waving tight wads of money.

"Will you win?" she asked him, experiencing an uncharacteristic twinge of doubt.

He glanced around at the faces in the crowd, as he always did. "Why not? You freed your eels, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then I'll win," he said with a smile. "It is written in the heavens."

"You make fun of me now."

"After so many years? I would be a fool!"

She'd asked him once, years ago, why he always studied the faces in the crowd so carefully. "Because," he had replied, "someday someone will come to kill me." His answer had terrified her, and all that night she'd lain awake sobbing, unable to accept even the remote possibility of his death. She'd never asked him the question again, though he still gazed out at the gathering crowds each evening before a kite fight as if anticipating some danger that never arrived.

This evening the south wind was perfect, and the young Pakistani launched his kite easily while the crowd cheered. Many of them came, Madame Wu realized, hoping to see the American defeated. She'd told Crawford that once, but he didn't seem to mind. It only made the bets against him larger and increased his own winnings.

Now, gauging the wind by the movement of his opponent's kite, he released his own star kite and ran with the heavy barbed string

until he could position it for the attack. For several minutes the rival kites maneuvered close to one another. Then the smaller kite managed to snare Crawford's star with its long tail. Madame Wu drew a sharp breath and waited while Crawford yanked his barbed string again and again. He had to get free quickly, before he could be dragged to earth.

Madame Wu thought of her eels flashing free through the lily-covered waters of the canal.

Then Crawford gave a final jerk to his kite string and the crowd cheered. He was free. Even those who had wagered against him applauded his skill. Madame Wu wanted to add her praise but she knew better than to speak to him during a match. There would be plenty of time to replay the details back at their apartment over the curio shop while he relaxed with a pipe.

Now there was still the match to be won. Crawford released more of his barbed string, and let the star kite climb gently with an updraft. His kite was positioned well above the challenger, in a near classic posture for attack. The heavy barbed string moved in, but the Pakistani still had a few tricks left. He sent his smaller kite into several dipping spins, bringing it almost to the ground, each time managing to avoid the cutting barbs.

The kites maneuvered in the wind for another ten minutes before the end came quite quickly. Crawford saw his opportunity and took it, swooping down to loop his string around that of the smaller kite. Then he pulled it in and the barbs sliced easily through the Pakistani's string. The small kite, freed of its mooring, rose with the wind and drifted over the trees as the crowd cheered. Crawford allowed himself a slight smile as he began pulling in his own kite. Then he went around collecting on his bets as Madame Wu trailed behind.

Later, over drinks at a nearby outdoor nightclub, one of the other gamblers conceded, "Crawford, you're the best there is. You're better than any of these local lads, and better than the Pakistanis, too." His name was Bates and he was a British merchant who often made big wagers on the kite fights.

Crawford smiled his sleepy smile and said, "It was Madame Wu's eels that did it for me. I'm a great believer in local customs."

"I can see that." Bates drained his glass and ordered another drink. "There's a young American in town," he said casually. "Have you met him yet?"

"Who would that be?" Crawford asked.

"His name's Michael Fleet. He says he was in Vietnam, like you were."

Crawford merely grunted. A great many young Americans had passed through Bangkok in the years he'd been there. But Madame Wu sensed there was some other purpose to the Englishman's inquiry. "What is so special about this American?" she asked.

Bates toyed with his empty glass while awaiting a refill. "He says he wants to learn kite fighting. I thought he might look you up."

"Maybe he will," Crawford conceded. He put down his glass and stood up. "Come on, Anna. It's time we were getting home."

"When will you be fighting again?" Bates wanted to know.

"When the south wind is right and the bets are big." Crawford picked up the star kite, which was leaning against the wall, and went out with Madame Wu behind him.

She carefully filled the long pipe and handed it to him as he lay on the bed. "What are you thinking of?" she asked.

"Lots of things. How it was back home—and in Vietnam."

Madame Wu took a deep breath. "You said once, a long time ago, that someday a man would come to kill you. Do you remember that?"

"I remember," he said.

"You are different tonight—since the Englishman mentioned this young American. Do you fear him?"

He turned away from her on the bed. "I don't want to talk about it now."

"Why would anyone come after all these years?"

"Some people have long memories," he said simply.

"Is that why you never went home to America?"

"That, and other reasons."

She sighed and changed the subject. "How much money did you win tonight?"

"About six thousand bahts," he said and turned back to her with a smile. "That's around three hundred American dollars. Very good for an hour's work."

She smiled too. It was very good. But it reminded her that she had not checked the day's receipts in the curio shop. "I will be back," she told him. He nodded and drew on his pipe.

Downstairs she went quickly about the task of counting the cash in the register and adding up the credit card purchases. While she

was working she happened to glance out the big front window and saw a man standing in the shadows across the street. Though she could not see his face, she thought he was watching the building.

When she went back to the apartment she did not mention the man to Crawford.

The following morning over breakfast she asked, "Why do we stay in Bangkok, Crawford? We could go to Australia and I could open a new shop there."

"Australia? What gave you that idea?"

"Perhaps it is time for a new beginning."

He grunted and sipped his coffee.

"I'd better go down and open the shop," she decided.

The sign over the front read MADAME WU'S CURIO EMPORIUM. Crawford had christened it that when she opened the place with money he'd supplied. She'd never asked him about the money, which somehow had come with him out of the jungles of Vietnam. She had learned long ago to accept without question whatever life had to offer her.

But now there was a man waiting for her to open the shop. Instinctively she knew it was the man she'd seen in the shadows across the street last night. She tried to smile as she unlocked the door and said, "Come right in. We're open for business."

"Does Sidney Crawford live here?" he asked.

She studied his tanned face and saw a young, innocent expression that might have belonged to an angel in an old painting. Surely that face could hold no danger for Crawford. "Yes," she said. "He lives here. Who are you?"

"Name's Michael Fleet. Mike Fleet. I want to learn kite fighting."

She recognized the name as the one Bates had mentioned the previous evening. "Were you there last night?" she asked.

"I sure was! But afterward you all went off in a crowd to the nightclub and I didn't want to intrude. An Englishman named Bates said I should see Crawford. He said he's the best kite fighter in the city."

"I suppose he is," she admitted. "But why would you want to learn such a sport? It is not like boxing or *takraw* or sword duels, our more traditional sports. Some even say that kite fighting is only a game for boy-men who have never grown up."

"There's money in it. I won a hundred bahts myself last night, betting on Crawford."

The idea of winning a five dollar bet seemed to excite him so much that she knew she had to let him meet Crawford. His innocence was genuine. "Wait here," she told him, and disappeared into the back of the shop to climb the stairs to their apartment.

When she told Crawford he eyed her with suspicion. "It's the boy Bates mentioned," he said.

"Yes. He is harmless. He only wants to kite fight, to learn from the master. He won five dollars betting on you last night."

Crawford snorted. "He mustn't consider me much of a master if that's all he bet." He buttoned his shirt and tucked it into his pants. "All right. Send him up."

But as she went back downstairs she saw him reach into the drawer where he kept his Beretta pistol beneath a pile of underwear.

Mike Fleet was twenty-six years old, a young man from California who'd gotten to Vietnam just as the Americans were withdrawing. "I never did get to see enough of this part of the world," he told them when they'd welcomed him upstairs, "so I decided to stay over here and bum around for a few years."

"It's a long few years," Crawford pointed out. "The war ended in '75."

"Yeah. The time does pass quickly when you're havin' fun." For just an instant Madame Wu thought she saw the mask of innocence slip. Then it was back in place as the young American said, "I want to learn to kite fight like you, Mr. Crawford."

"I'm just Crawford here, son. And if you stay you'll just be Fleet. The locals don't have time for two names—not when they're making bets before a match."

"Then you'll teach me?"

Crawford eyed him for a moment before replying. "Maybe." He got to his feet. "Come on—I'll take you along to the Pramane Ground while I try out a new kite."

It was some time before Madame Wu could close her curio shop for an hour and join them. When she reached the open space north of the palace she saw that Crawford had turned the kite string over to Mike Fleet, who was guiding it well, listening while Crawford coached him on every movement.

As Madame Wu stood watching from the edge of the field she

was joined by the Englishman, Bates. "I see that young American found Crawford."

"Yes," she replied. "He came to my shop this morning."

Bates nodded. "Seems like a nice chap."

Presently the two Americans ceased their sport and walked over to Madame Wu and the Englishman. "He's got the makings of a champ," Crawford conceded, patting the younger man on the shoulder. "Come back tomorrow, Fleet, and we'll put up both kites at once and spar a bit."

"You mean that?"

"I mean it."

Mike Fleet left with a grin on his face.

"Where do all these young Americans come from?" Bates wondered aloud. "What in God's name brings them to Bangkok? Is it drugs, or women, or what?"

"We have plenty of both," Crawford replied. "He sure didn't come all this distance to learn kite fighting."

Later, back at the apartment, Madame Wu asked, "Do you want me to prepare your pipe?"

Crawford shook his head. "Not yet. Come here. I want to talk. I want to tell you about Vietnam."

"There is no need."

"I want you to know about it in case anything happens to me."

"Crawford—you will live forever!"

He laughed and took her in his arms. "I believed that myself once, when I was younger."

"All right," she agreed. "Tell me about it."

"When I was in the army," he began, "in 1970, right before I came here and met you, I was given a great deal of American money and sent on a mission into the jungle. I was to meet a man and pay him to assassinate one of the North Vietnamese leaders. The assassination would have been carried out by powerful explosives which would also have killed a great many innocent people. It was war, they told me—and innocent people die all the time in war."

"I knew it was true. I'd seen a village destroyed by napalm just the week before. Well, I went off on my mission, but somewhere along the line I decided it was time for the killing to stop. I never met the man in the jungle, I crossed over into Cambodia and kept going until I reached Thailand. I moved along the coast, sometimes paying native fishermen to take me short distances by boat."

"But why would they want to kill you for that?" Madame Wu asked. "What you did was a good thing, not bad."

"That depends on how you look at it. I imagine there are people back home who figure I betrayed my country and lost the war all by myself."

"It was a long time ago, Crawford."

"Nearly ten years now," he agreed.

"Why are you telling me now? Because you fear this boy who has come looking for you?"

"He's no boy. He's twenty-six years old. Old enough to be a trained assassin."

"Why would they send a trained assassin when any one of a hundred persons in the crowd could kill you at a kite fight?"

"I don't know," he admitted.

"And if you fear him so much, why have you agreed to teach him to kite fight?"

"Maybe I've got some crazy idea of winning him over. Maybe I figure if he gets to know me well enough he won't be able to kill me."

"And maybe you're wrong about him."

"We'll see," he said quietly.

They held a mock kite fight the following evening and though Crawford cut up the younger man's kite quite badly, Fleet managed to stay in the contest for nearly an hour. Then they switched kites and Crawford demonstrated the techniques of soaring and gliding by which the smaller kite's long tail could be used to entangle the star points of the larger kite. The young man learned fast, with an intensity Madame Wu could only admire.

But at the end of the evening she had a question for Fleet while Crawford gathered up the fallen kites. "The other morning when you came to my shop—I saw you watching it the night before."

"Yes," he admitted. "I was trying to work up my courage. Finally I decided to wait till morning."

"I see."

"He's a great man, Crawford is."

"I think so," Madame Wu said. "I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to him."

"You speak English quite well," Fleet observed, studying her closely for the first time. "Did Crawford teach you?"

"The Americans taught me. Crawford was the last of many, but the most important one. After Crawford, I want no more teachers."

"What about this man Bates?"

"He was a doctor once, but when he came here a few years back he was a merchant, employed by a British company. He doesn't talk much about his past. No one does in Bangkok."

"Does Crawford?"

Her eyes searched his face. "He talks to me. Why do you wonder?"

Mike Fleet shrugged. "I don't know. I asked him about Vietnam and he changed the subject. Hell, we were both there! I thought he'd want to talk about it."

"Some things are better left in the past."

Bates had appeared from somewhere to speak with Crawford and when they parted Crawford came over with the kites to where Fleet and Madame Wu stood waiting. "Bates says the Pakistani wants a rematch."

"Will you give him one?" Fleet wanted to know.

"It's customary. One rematch—like in championship boxing."

"When?" Madame Wu asked.

"Tomorrow evening."

"I will need to free more eels."

Crawford's eyes twinkled. "What's the matter? The last batch run out of steam already?"

"For the major kite fights a new ritual is needed."

He smiled at Fleet. "I taught her everything I know about business but she still can't face a decision or a kite fight without releasing her eels."

"She's a fine woman," the younger man said. "I wish I could find one half as good in this city."

"There are new ones arriving every day from the rural areas. Some say there might be as many as two hundred thousand prostitutes in Bangkok."

Fleet blushed at his words. "I don't mean a prostitute."

Crawford turned to Madame Wu. "Tell him what you were when I found you, Anna."

She sucked in her breath and said, very quietly, not looking at either of them, "I was a bar hostess at the Café of Floating Lights. Crawford took me away from that and set me up in business."

"You're a lucky man, Crawford. With a woman like this I wouldn't have gone back home either."

"Let's hope you find one," Crawford said.

They parted then, and Madame Wu fell into step beside Crawford. "What do you think of him?" she asked.

Crawford pondered a moment. Then he said simply, "I think he's been sent to kill me."

Over breakfast the next morning Crawford made plans for the day. "I need to fix up the kite a bit for tonight. Fleet will be there and I have to put on a good show for him."

"Even if he plans to kill you?"

"I could be wrong. Maybe he's as innocent as you think. Anyway, I can't go through the rest of my life looking over my shoulder."

She went downstairs to the shop with him. He needed to buy more heavy kite string so she unlocked the door to let him out. It was not yet nine o'clock, and the little street of shops was still nearly deserted. As he stood in the doorway she heard something like a muffled cough. He stepped back into the shop and slammed the door. He was holding his side and when he took his hand away Madame Wu saw the blood.

"Crawford—what is it?" She tried to keep her voice calm, though her heart was racing.

"Someone just took a shot at me from across the street. Either he used a silencer or it was a small-caliber target pistol."

"Did you see anyone?" she asked, pulling away his shirt to expose the wound.

"No. Don't bother with that. It just grazed me."

"You're bleeding. You need stitches."

"He's a damned lousy shot."

"Lucky for you! I must get you to a doctor."

"No. A little tape will close the wound."

"You will bleed to death!" She was insistent now. Though there was not much blood, his face was very pale.

She helped him upstairs and brought some tape, but after an examination of the wound in a mirror he was forced to agree with her.

"All right," he said. "Call Bates. He used to be a doctor."

"Why not go to a hospital?"

"I'd just as soon the word didn't get around quite yet. Right now, whoever tried to kill me doesn't know how badly I'm hurt. That could be an advantage for the next few hours."

She tried Bates's number three times before he answered. When

his voice finally came on the line she said, "Mr. Bates, someone tried to kill Crawford. Could you come here right away, please?"

"What? How badly is he hurt?"

"Not too bad, I think."

"I'll be right over."

When she hung up she started thinking about the eels. Now, it seemed, they were more important than ever. It was no longer merely a kite fight that was at stake, but Crawford's life.

She went to him and said, "When Bates comes I must go out for some eels."

He tried to laugh, but she could see he was in pain.

"Is it bad, Crawford?"

"A scrape. I'll be good as new."

She went downstairs to wait for Bates. When he arrived he was carrying a small black medical bag she'd never seen before. For the first time she believed the story that he had been a doctor once.

"Who shot him?" he demanded.

"We don't know. We saw no one. Go up to him, Bates, and patch his wound. I must do some shopping, but I will be back."

She made her way down the street, past the other shops that were just opening their doors. The morning mist was burning off early and the sun would quickly warm the air.

At the great outdoor market there was no sign of the boy who sold the eels, and for a moment she panicked. Then she saw him across the field near one of the dried-up canals. He had a pushcart full of brown plastic bags that seemed to writhe even as she watched. "Quickly, boy!" she called out. "Sell me nine eels for luck!"

Clutching her purchase close, feeling the eels move against her as if anxious for their coming freedom, she was tempted to go immediately to the Klong Maha Nak. But then something stirred in her memory. Something dangerous.

Crawford was in danger.

She hurried back to the shop, still clutching the plastic bag. She climbed the stairs to the kitchen and listened.

Bates and Crawford were talking in the bedroom. The Englishman laughed about something and then came out to the kitchen with his black bag.

He saw Madame Wu by the table and smiled. "He'll be as good as new. I took a couple of stitches and taped him up well."

"That's fine."

"I'll go now," he said. "Let him get a bit of rest."

"Mr. Bates—"

"Yes?"

"When you arrived you asked who shot Crawford. But on the phone I only told you someone tried to kill him. How did you know it was by shooting?"

"I—"

"I think it was you, Mr. Bates, hiding across the street when he came out this morning."

"What? What are you talking about?" His black bag had come open and he was reaching inside.

Madame Wu saw the bread knife on the table, just out of reach. She knew she had made a terrible mistake. Even as she tried to speak again, Bates raised the silenced pistol and fired three times.

Crawford opened his eyes. Bates was coming back into the room. "What was that noise?" Crawford asked.

Then he saw the gun in the Englishman's hand. It was a hit man's weapon—a .22 caliber target pistol with a silencer.

"I had to kill her, Crawford, so I might as well finish you off too. I can make it look as if you killed each other."

"It was you across the street this morning!"

"Yes," Bates said, raising the pistol until Crawford was looking down it. "You always knew someone would come, didn't you?"

"You came three years ago. Why did you wait so long?"

"My position was too safe here. I didn't want to jeopardize it with a foolish killing. Once I knew it was you I spent some time trying to find out what you did with the money."

"It's downstairs in the curio shop."

"I know that now."

"What business is it of yours whether I live or die?"

Bates shrugged. "None, personally. It wasn't my war, after all. But I'm an arms merchant, selling to various factions in Southeast Asia. There are people who still remember you—who say you lost the war. They told me I had to kill you if I wanted to stay in business. So I waited for the right opportunity—the appearance of a young American I could pin it on. That's why I patched you up just now. It wouldn't do to kill you here, where Fleet might not be blamed. I planned to have another try tonight after the kite fight. She forced my hand—so now you'll die together."

"Wait—" Crawford began, trying to rise from the bed.

"I'll miss you, Crawford," Bates said, his finger whitening on the trigger. "I won a great deal of money on you."

That was when Madame Wu plunged the bread knife into his back.

"You made a terrible mess," Crawford told her. "There's blood all over the place."

Madame Wu sat trembling in the chair while they waited for the police. "I never killed anyone before. Is that what it's like?"

"That's what it's like. You saved my life, Anna."

"It was the eels," she told him. "I was holding them to my chest when he shot me. The bullets knocked me over, but they hit the eels."

"I guess I'll never doubt you again when you say that they bring good luck."

"Will there be others like Bates who come to kill you?"

"Perhaps."

"What will you do now?"

He touched his side and winced. "I may not be able to handle the kite this evening. I'll have to see if young Fleet can carry on for me."

Fire Burning Bright

by Brendan DuBois

The first thing I did when the phone rang was to check the glowing red numerals of my bedroom clock radio, which told me it was four in the morning. Some people take a while to wake up when a loud noise—like a telephone—disturbs their sleep. Not me. Any loud noise at night is like a hand grenade rolled underneath my bed—it quickly gets my attention.

I swung around and switched on the side lamp, and by the time the third chime had rung, I had picked up the receiver and had a pen in the other hand.

It was Norma Quentin, night dispatcher for Franconia County. She didn't bother apologizing for waking me up. She knows me too well.

"Thought you'd be interested," she said, as she always does. "Purmort volunteer just responded up on Timberswamp Road—looks like a fire, suspicious origins and all the rest."

"Jesus," I murmured. "Tate Burnham?"

Her voice hesitated, just a bit. I'll always remember that. "Don't know, Jerry. They've

been gone about ten minutes—it'll take a while for you to get there, even if you hurry."

I heard the crackle of static and I imagined her, sitting in a darkened cubicle, in the basement of the county courthouse, linked by telephone and radio to the rest of the county, the console lights making her skin look bloodless. I was sure her two stainless steel crutches would be there, at her side, along with a .38 caliber revolver.

"Gotta go," Norma said. "Calls coming in."

Soon I was dressed and in my Ford pickup, driving north along Route 3, my reporter's notebook and camera bag on the cold and hard vinyl seat. The center of Purmort looked quiet enough—the few stores and two service stations darkened and empty—and in a few seconds I was back on Route 3, passing the small wooden building that held Justin's Plumbing Supplies, and the offices of the weekly *Purmort Sentinel* (Jerry Auberg, editor).

It was cold, very cold for October, and the lights from the

truck caught the bright colors of the foliage of the trees along Route 3, which each fall enticed tourists to drive for hours. On both sides of the two lane road, up beyond the trees and forests, were the ridgelines of the Purmort range. The mass of the mountains was impressive, like distant battleships sailing silently and without lights. I wondered what creatures lived up there at night and I shivered.

I missed the turnoff for Timberswamp Road and had to make a sloppy U-turn farther down. Timberswamp was a town-maintained road, unlike Route 3, which is maintained by the state. Purmort being Purmort, the road was cracked and bumpy and there were no streetlights at all. The few homes were set far into the woods, and all of them had bright and powerful yard lights on. I drove a mile and six-tenths by the truck's odometer before I saw the flashing lights of the firetrucks and police cruisers. I pulled up behind another pickup truck—one belonging to a volunteer firefighter, no doubt, since it had a slap-on red strobe light on its roof—and stepped out, swinging my camera bag over one shoulder. The cold hit me like a wet towel against my face, and I saw my breath in the frigid air.

There were lights everywhere, blue ones from the two Purmort police cruisers and red ones from the two fire engines from the Purmort volunteer fire department. There was the loud crackling of radio static coming from the vehicles, and I walked along the road, nodding and looking at the huddled groups of volunteer firefighters, many in their nightclothes and wearing bunker jackets and heavy boots. It was then that an odd thing happened.

By that time, after all that had gone on over the summer, most of them had begun to at least accept me, if not quite trust me. But as I walked by none of them looked my way. They turned their backs and talked to one another, like tiny herds of animals in winter turning among themselves, protecting one another from an outside threat.

I walked up the road, a slight embankment of dirt and grass on the right, and that was when the smell of smoke and something else struck me, and I held onto the camera bag strap very tightly.

It began in spring, and innocently at first, with a few grass fires along some of the farms that dotted the outlying areas of Purmort. At first the firefighters and the chief of

police, Randy Parnell, blamed the fires on kids smoking cigarettes or raising hell in preparation for summer vacation. Being the editor and sole reporter—and owner—of the *Sentinel*, I put the stories inside the paper. No cause for giving the kids publicity, I thought.

It was my fifth year in Purmort, and by the beginning of that fifth summer, I was beginning to feel that at long last Purmort was coming around to my presence. I don't blame them much for resenting me when I started there—I had come from that great hedonistic state to the south, and I was well-educated and a newspaperman, always a doubtful combination in a small town. But I came in with a large reserve of smiles and a willingness not to be pushed around, and in a while the *Sentinel* did all right. I didn't ignore the petty crimes and drunk driving arrests that every town offers, but neither did I go on investigatory rampages if the town road agent plowed out a few family drive-ways for free when times were tough in the winter.

The fires that spring meant nothing, and I was looking forward to another round of Town Meeting stories, until a warm May weekend when a summer cottage on Lake Arthur and a barn on Swallow Reach burned

down. Then the state came in, with state police detectives and experts in arson, and in a while, through a tersely-worded press release, it was announced that the grass fires and the fires at the cottage and barn were connected. There was an arsonist at work in Purmort.

For the moment, at least, I found that hard to believe. I had come to Purmort after thirty years of banging around in newspaper work in some of the larger cities in Connecticut and Massachusetts, eventually reaching the top levels of editorial staffs. And one warm spring day, as cliché-ridden as it may sound, I decided I didn't want to be the top editor of one of those large dailies any more. I had gone to too many funerals of my fellow editors and writers, and I decided I didn't want to be remembered and then forgotten at a similar service. By then I was by myself. My wife Angela had left me some years back, after deciding she wanted to discover herself, and every now and then she sends me an oddly-written postcard from some small community in New Mexico, where she makes pottery. Our only son moved out to California, working in an esoteric field of physics and computers I could never fathom, and twice a year—as regular as elections—I get cards from him

for Father's Day and Christmas, each enclosing a hundred dollar check.

With that spring decision, I eventually made it to Purmort, buying a failing weekly newspaper in the process. Now, five years later, two parts of me reacted when I heard about the arsonist: as a newspaper editor interested in a story, one more exciting than anything else going on in the area, and as a resident of Purmort, wondering if my home would be there when I got home late from a selectman's meeting or county fair.

I liked Purmort, and I liked my home. It was small and sturdily-built, with two woodstoves and a tiny barn, set on a well-wooded lot on the Sher River. In the house and barn I had thirty years of newspaper clippings, mementos and memories, over a thousand books and years of color slides from trips all over Canada and the West, and Lord, how I didn't want to miss that. For the very first time I thought of my past arrogance as an editor, spiking stories about house and apartment fires, or burying them far inside the paper. "Not news," I would say. "Happens all the time," and I never suspected then the gut-wrenching feeling of coming home with all of your thoughts and hopes and wishes of a quiet evening, and seeing

only a blackened pile of rubble where your den used to be.

After hearing the news of the arsonist I had to travel to three towns before finding a store that hadn't sold out of smoke detectors, and I installed one in the basement, one on each floor of the house, and one in my barn. And, like so many of the townspeople in Purmort, I began going to bed at night with all the outdoor lights on and a loaded shotgun by my bed. I slept with a suitcase of clothes at my side and at night—no matter how cold—I kept a bedroom window open, to hear an approaching vehicle or footsteps along the grass.

Like so many others in Purmort, I never got a good night's sleep that summer.

For a week after the first spate of fires nothing happened, until one night, after a church meeting, the Olson family from Mast Road came home to see their two-hundred-year-old farmhouse burning bright, like a beacon upon a hill. It took Kerry Olson ten minutes to drive to his nearest neighbor to find a phone, and by the time the two engines from the Purmort volunteer fire department roared up, the house had collapsed and there was nothing left to do but wet down the embers.

And just when we started to appreciate the shock of that, a

day later, half of Mrs. Corinne Everett's house burned before the Purmort department and some firefighters from Tannon arrived to save the other half. But she never went back home, Mrs. Everett, and she went to live in the county nursing home. I visited her once, for a follow-up story, and she sat alone in a wooden chair, staring out the window, and all she could talk about was her home, and her pet parakeet who had perished.

Oh, how the town started to change that summer. It was always another cliché that Purmort was a town where one could go to sleep at night with the house unlocked, but it was true, and the arsonist took that away. For a week or two the people in town, sitting around the Common Coffeeshop, or at Tay's Tire, gossiped and complained and nodded and said that it had to be an outsider, some damn flatlander who was doing the burnings. But that talk faded away when it became apparent the arsonist knew the town, knew the people, and knew them both very well. When that became known, the people of Purmort stopped looking over their shoulders, and started looking at each other.

One of the selectmen, Jeff Tamworth, talked to me one night, his leathery and wrinkled face puzzled and dismayed

at the same time. "Jerry," he said as we sat in one of the booths and shared a meatloaf dinner at Ruby's Diner, "I've lived here all my goddamn life and I can't believe what I'm seeing. People are hushing up all the time now and staring at each other, and you know why? 'Cause you don't know who the son of a bitch is. He might be the guy sittin' next to you, having a smoke and a cup of coffee, and you sure as hell don't want to say you're going to visit your mom next weekend and the house is gonna be empty, or you don't want to talk about goin' on vacation. Christ, when you can't talk about stuff like that with your neighbors, it's almost as bad as it gets in the big cities."

Having spent years in the big cities, I was too polite to disagree with him, but two nights later Jeff Tamworth and I were in agreement.

That night I was out doing a story about Bob Reardon, who'd come back from a trip out to Alaska where he had done some big game hunting. It would be a nice human interest piece, something to lighten up the *Sentinel's* pages since the fires started. But while Bob might have been a demon behind a high-powered rifle, he was lousy at directions—probably couldn't tell you which direction the sun rises every morning.

So I found myself driving back and forth on Blueberry Hill Road, looking for a green house with white shutters and a dirt driveway. About the third time I made the round trip I pulled over next to a driveway to look at my notes again. But before I could switch on the inside light, the barrel of the biggest and blackest shotgun I ever saw came through my open window and stopped about six inches from my head. I froze, both hands in mid-air.

A voice from the darkness: "Now who the hell are you, and what are you doing out here?"

"Jerry Auberg, from the *Sentinel*," I said, trying to keep my voice even. "I'm looking for Bob Reardon's place."

The shotgun barrel wavered, and then slowly pulled away. I turned and saw a heavyset man, with a thick and scraggly beard, looking in, chewing on a lower lip. He wore a red and black checkered hunter's jacket. "Got proof on that?" he said.

Luckily, I had a couple of copies of the newspaper with me, plus my driver's license. Within seconds the shotgun was by the man's side and he offered me his hand, which I shook, more to stop the trembling than anything else.

"Tyler Whitney," he said, motioning with his shoulder. "Live up there on the hill. I was

standing watch tonight, my brother Ray, he takes the morning shift, and I saw your truck go back and forth a couple of times. Sorry if I scared you, but me and my brother are building a house up there. We don't want to lose it."

"It's all right," I said, though I sure as hell didn't feel all right. But I decided polite talk in the presence of a shotgun was the best approach.

"You're a newspaper man," he said. "They getting any closer to catching that fellow?"

I said, "No, not that I know of, and if they were, I'm sure the cops wouldn't tell me. Arson's such a tough crime to prove—you almost have to catch the guy lighting something off."

"Maybe so," Tyler Whitney said, picking up his shotgun. "But that fella better hope the cops catch him first. One of these nights he's gonna pick the wrong place to torch, and he's gonna get his damn head blown off, cops or no cops. And, buddy, you can print that in your newspaper."

When he left I drove a few feet, stopped and stepped out and got sick by the side of the road. If he had been any meaner, if he had been drinking . . . I remembered the closeness of that shotgun barrel, imagined smelling the gun oil and the gunpowder, tightly wadded up

and ready to explode with a twitch of a finger, less than six inches from my head.

I'm afraid I never did the interview that night with Bob Reardon.

The fires stopped for eight days, and some residents started wondering aloud if the arsonist had gotten tired or scared.

And on the ninth night, he burned down the town garage.

The mood in Purmort grew worse. People were getting dark circles under their eyes from staying up so late, and arguments and even a few fistfights broke out over trivial things at the Common Coffeeshop or Ruby's Diner. Some children collected their favorite toys or dolls and mailed them to friends in other towns or states for safe-keeping.

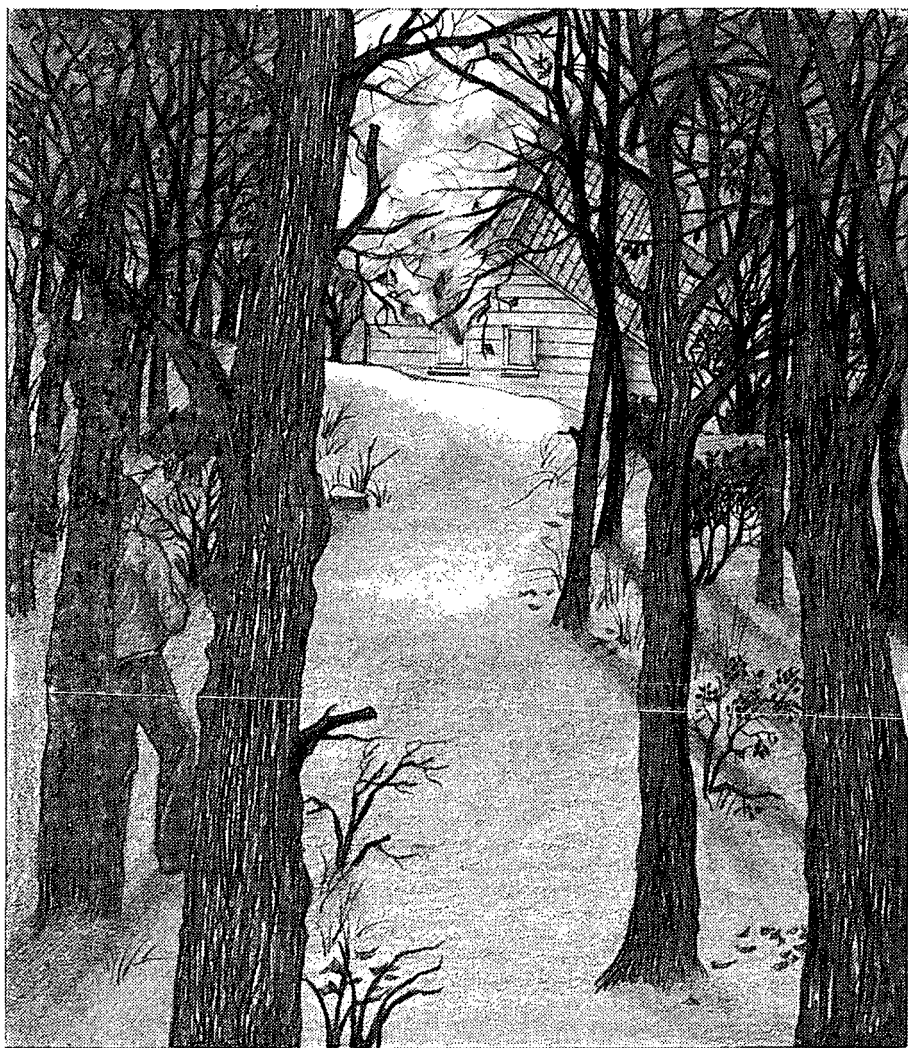
One of the worst nights was the night a benefit dinner was held at the Congregationalist Church, to raise money for the fire victims, four families who sat silenced and embarrassed in one corner of the church basement. The night was going along all right—the usual hams, casseroles, and baked beans—until a group of Purmort volunteer firefighters came in, dressed in their blue nylon windbreakers. And seeing that, Mrs. Olson—who had lost a hundred-year-old doll collection in her home—stood up and

screamed, "I'll bet it's one of them, one of those volunteers. Why not? They know how to put fires out—I'll bet you they know how to set them!" Then some of the volunteers' wives shouted back at her, and it got worse.

And if the fires weren't bad enough, my friends and the townspeople of Purmort had to put up with another burden—the media.

For a short while the only stories about the burning of Purmort appeared in the *Sentinel*, or in stories filed to the statewide *Union Leader* by Amos Turin, a retired high school English teacher who lived in Tannon, the next town over. But after the town garage fire, and the fire at the Keefes' (where the eighty-seven-year-old grandmother survived by clambering out of her bedroom window and onto a garage), the wire services picked up the stories. And the avalanche started.

Boston newspapers and television stations. Camera crews from the four networks. *Time* and *Newsweek*. Reporters and writers and producers in fancy clothes, standing in the middle of the common, wanting to know where the "downtown" was and the taxi stands. When this onslaught started I had some serious thoughts to myself and spoke with Chief Parnell, finding him at his basement office



I LIKED PURMORT, AND I LIKED MY HOME. IT WAS SMALL AND STUR-
DILY-BUILT, SET ON A WELL-WOODED LOT ON THE SHER RIVER.

in the Town Hall. He had lost a lot of weight, his usual sleek green police uniform a baggy and greasy-looking mockery. His eyes were red-rimmed and almost lifeless, like those belonging to a man fighting an invisible and spiteful foe.

I said, "Chief, when these media types get here, you be on your best behavior."

This stirred him some from his seat, huddled against a paper-filled desk. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean these are pros, out-of-state, sent up here to do a story. They don't give a hoot about you or Purmort. They can buddy up to you and say, 'Don't worry, whatever you say will be off the record,' and it'll be on the six o'clock news that night. They're up here for one story and then they're gone, and you'll never see them again. They don't care what happens once they leave."

The chief seemed to take that to heart, but not Ryan Duffy, the volunteer fire chief who worked days in Tannon. He was quoted in almost every story, and his fat, bearded face was on a lot of newscasts. It backfired, of course, with some of his own men griping about him, and eventually the state police sat on him and told Ryan to shut up. Before that, unfortunately, there were two camera crews on

hand the night Mrs. Olson started screaming at the firefighters in the Congregationalist Church basement. That made the evening news, with a lot of analyzing about "small town pressures" and "coping mechanisms" and a lot of false sympathy from the television people.

One afternoon I was half-heartedly typing up some deed transfers at the *Sentinel's* office when a familiar-looking man came in, dressed in casual clothes—designer jeans and sport shirt—that blinked a high price tag at you. He was about my age, beefy-looking and grinning, with dark, thinning hair. He had a gold watch about his thick wrist, and as he approached I stood up and stuck out my hand and said, "Well, I'll be jigged. Harmon Kirk. Harmon, I don't think I've spoken to you for five years."

His grip was strong. "Right with that, Jerry."

I said, "Still with the *Courant*?"

"No, that was two papers ago. Got my own column, syndicated in a lot of dailies in the Northeast. Hope to go national next year."

Well, I knew what he was up here for, but for a while, at least, we were polite to each other, trading war stories and lies about past editors and sto-

ries. As we talked I admit I looked about my office, noticing the three mismatched desks and the piles of newsprint and the manual typewriters. A long distance from the many computerized newsrooms I had worked in.

Harmon finally said, "I guess you can figure why I'm here, Jerry. I'm doing a piece on your fires, and when I found out you were here, I knew I had to come by."

"Not my fires," I said, trying to smile. "And I'll be happy to tell you what I know, so long as I'm not quoted in any way."

Harmon's smile flickered a bit, like an old light bulb. "Not even for an old drinking companion?"

I tapped on my chair arm a few times. "Harmon, drinking companion or no, I've been interviewed and re-interviewed by a dozen of your colleagues and I'm—"

"They're your colleagues, too," he interrupted.

I said, "True, but I also live here. This is my home."

He said nothing for a moment, making me think he was going to leave, and he said, "Okay—off the record, I hear rumors that there are vigilantes up in the hills, trying to track down the arsonist. Any truth to that?"

I had heard the same rumors,

but I didn't want hundreds of thousands of Harmon's readers thinking that we were all crazy hill people up here, armed with rifles and the like. I shook my head no.

It was a fairly dispirited interview. After a few minutes Harmon slapped shut his notebook and said, "Sorry to say, Jerry, you sure as hell have changed since we were in the same newsroom. I don't think the old Jerry would've stonewalled me like that."

"The old Jerry never had a home—just rental agreements," I said. "You can imagine I feel a sense of responsibility here."

"What about your responsibility to your readers?"

I tried to smile, tried to make him see what I had become. "My readers all live within ten miles of here—they're my neighbors. And all of them, even me, are scared of losing our homes. And they see you folks coming in, making fun of them and using their tragedies for your own gain. Harmon, I like this town, I like it a lot, and I'm proud of living here."

A few days later—after the Unitarian Church burned down—I ran across Harmon Kirk's column in one of the larger dailies, and he had quoted me, of course, but by covering up my identity and naming me only as

a "local newsman." Being as I'm the only local newsman in Purmort, it didn't do much.

Another effect of the media barrage was to focus some of the townspeople's hostility on me. Even though I owned and wrote the local paper, and had done so for five years, the fires stripped away the thin layer of acceptability which I had so diligently grown over the many months. Hardly anyone talked to me on the streets, and sitting down at the lunch or breakfast counters at Ruby's Diner or the Common Coffeeshop meant people on either side of me would silently pick up their plates and move elsewhere.

Subscriptions to the *Sentinel*—never big to begin with—started to dwindle, and I found myself caught in the middle of two opinions. Some people in Purmort thought my stories only encouraged the arsonist, and that I should report nothing (nothing!) at all about the fires. And another group of people felt I was hiding news and information, important items that the state police and the chief were hiding.

As for the first point, I could never have kept the *Sentinel* silent about what was going on in Purmort, and as for the second point, I had to plead a modified guilty—I never printed everything I knew.

For one thing, I accidentally learned—through a thoughtless comment by one of the state police boys in the chief's office—how the fires were set. A set of oily rags, jammed into a corner or in a woodpile, and then set ablaze with three wooden matches. Repeated, every time. Seconds after I found this out Chief Parnell was practically on his knees, begging me not to use it.

"Jerry, this is the only thing we've got on the son of a bitch," the chief said. "The only thing. You write it up in the *Sentinel* and he'll switch to something else, and we'll never be able to tie him in to all the fires when we get him."

I had to think long and hard on that one, but in the end, I gave in. I wanted to report the news, but most of all, like everyone else in Purmort, I wanted the arsonist caught. If this made me a bad newsman, well, it was something I could live with. I wanted to save my home.

On a Wednesday late in September, I gained back some of the acceptance and respectability of the people of Purmort.

I had spent the afternoon having lunch and doing some work at home, and I was a mile on the road into town when I realized I had forgotten some notebooks in my kitchen. I

turned the pickup truck around in a school bus turnoff, and a few hundred feet from home, I saw a black cloud of smoke above the trees. I sped up, thinking maybe it was a car fire, or grass fire, or some kids camping out in my back yard.

I didn't bother to park the truck in the driveway—I drove across the lawn and into the back yard, watching the flames billow out and the smoke pour away from my barn.

It seemed like forever as I stood there by the truck, watching the flames grow larger, and watching the paint blister and blacken against the south wall of my house, and there was a quick, horrible debate going on inside my mind—call the fire department or grab the garden hose—what to do first?

Though the debate seemed to go on forever, it probably only lasted a few seconds. I ran to the garage, tossing aside rakes and shovels and grabbing the hard coil of a garden hose. My fingers and hands were trembling as I unrolled the hose in the back yard, and I broke two fingernails (and didn't notice it until the next day) screwing in one end to the outside faucet. As I worked I muttered a lot under my breath, hoping that someone, anyone, would see the smoke and call County Dispatch.

The smoke and flames rose

higher and the heat was tremendous, blackening and curling the grass, blistering the south wall of the house. I turned on the hose and the water came rushing out, and when I turned it against the barn I realized what a pitiful stream of water it really was. I kept the hose on the barn for a few long minutes—remembering what was stored there—but I knew the barn was lost after there was a sharp *crack* as one of the windows on the south wall of the house burst from the heat. I shuddered and turned the hose onto the south wall, trying to wet it down.

The fire trucks came in a few minutes, and in that time the entire south wall was charred and two windows were broken, but the house was saved. That was at least some consolation, for the barn had collapsed upon itself by the time the trucks arrived.

The barn, with at least two hundred books, my only childhood photos of myself and my parents' wedding album, my winter clothes, slides from my trans-Canada trip, and two book manuscripts I had always wanted to finish, was gone.

I didn't bother picking through the rubble. It would have depressed me even more. Instead, I spent fifty bucks for Burke Farnsworth to come by with his backhoe and flatten

everything and drive it into the cellar hole.

And seven days later—just a week!—Tate Burnham was arrested and charged with the arson.

I must give Chief Parnell and the state police credit, for not once had Tate Burnham's name come up in any of my conversations with the chief or the state. But I learned he had been one of the handful of suspects from the start, and mainly because of the practically-forgotten cottage fire that had started it all, on Lake Arthur. The cottage belonged to the Maynard family, and Tate Burnham—who worked in one of the mills in Tannon—had been dating seventeen-year-old Cindy Maynard. She had broken up with him and for revenge, perhaps, he had burned down the family's cottage. And to cover his tracks, the barn on Swallow Reach also went up in flames the same day.

Tate Burnham lived with his stepfather and mother in a trailer near the Purmort-Tannon line. And at one time, for about a year, he had been a volunteer firefighter in Purmort, until he dropped out last summer for no apparent reason.

The most-asked question, of course, was why? And in a private few minutes I had with Chief Parnell before Tate Burn-

ham's court hearing, the chief had shrugged and said, "We think he started liking it, that's all. Simple as that. He started burning things down and enjoyed it."

Simple motive, and a simple capture. One Wednesday members of the Greater Purmort Bird Club had been watching for a Great Thrush Whacker or something up on Garrison Hill, and they had seen Tate Burnham walk a ways across a field and go into some woods. Some minutes later they saw smoke rising in the distance and saw Tate run hell-bent-for-leather out of the woods. One of the birdwatchers recognized Tate and the state police and the chief were told, and they got search warrants and found a collection of rags and a box of matches identical to the ones used, a map marking some of the fires, and other evidence.

Though I was happy he was captured, I wished he had been caught sooner, but the fates didn't work that way. The smoke rising the day the birdwatchers saw Tate Burnham came from my barn.

A few days later I covered Tate Burnham's bail hearing, and that's when the so-called Miracle of Purmort occurred.

In the basement of the Town Hall, next to the police station, was the district court. On the

day of Tate Burnham's hearing, the benches were full and there was standing-room only against the cement walls. I managed to get a seat up front. The rest of the media horde had returned, including, I wasn't too happy to see, Harmon Kirk. He gave me a half-wave and I responded with a half-smile, and then Judge Temple came out, long black robe flowing. After some legal jumbo Chief Parnell and a state trooper came in, with Tate Burnham between them.

Tate was barely twenty, standing at least six feet and gangly. He had an acne-scarred face and a scraggly beard, and he wore army fatigue pants and a black T-shirt imprinted with a colorful logo from one of those rock bands. There was a collective sigh in the room when he walked in, and I wondered suddenly why Chief Parnell or some county sheriffs hadn't frisked the crowd as they came in. It would have been mighty easy to smuggle in a pistol or a sawed-off shotgun, and Harmon Kirk caught my eye and smiled again, and I knew the same thing was on his—and others'—minds. No doubt the rest of the media were there to cover the bail hearing, but I'm sure some were secretly hoping for an outburst or a vigilante display.

After some more legal talk

Judge Temple set bail at fifty thousand dollars, cash or surety, meaning property or some such being put up for the bail amount. I heard a few low moans from the front right bench, and saw a heavy woman in black polyester stretch pants and a teary-eyed man, arm across her shoulders, and I imagined they were Tate Burnham's parents. That amount probably seemed as much as a million dollars to them, and I saw Tate turn and smirk at his parents, and at that moment I felt my jaw clench, knowing this smiling twerp had torn a part of my life out with his rags and matches.

Then a few people started coming forward, either with checks or pieces of paper in their hands, and the court clerk look flustered and went up to the judge, and soon there was a line of people at the bench, all carrying something in their hands, and the courtroom started buzzing and I was scrambling to write in my reporter's notebook as Judge Temple rapped his gavel and said, "Tate Burnham, you should consider yourself one lucky soul. About twenty of your neighbors have come forward to pay your bail."

There was some shouting and crying from his parents, but after a few moments the handcuffs were off Tate Burnham

and he was being hustled out of the courtroom, past the bright lights of the television cameras and the microphones of the reporters. The place became very crowded and I found myself wedged in among some reporters next to Wayne Ferguson, road agent for the town, who scratched at his bald head and explained why he had put up one thousand dollars for Tate Burnham's release.

Wayne Ferguson said, "Well, the boy's troubled, anyone can see that. I don't see what purpose or good it'd do, having him put in jail until the trial. No purpose at all. After all's said and done, he's from Purmort, he's a neighbor. And we take care of our own here."

With that he pushed some of us aside and I was next to Harmon Kirk, who carried one of those hand-held Japanese tape recorders.

Harmon said, "Hell of a good story, Jerry."

"That it is. But you must be disappointed—no vigilantes."

Harmon smiled at that. "Right. No vigilantes. My editors will be dismayed. Guess I'll have to pitch them a piece about a crazy town with a big heart."

"Guess so," and with that phrase, never had I been so proud to be a resident of Purmort.

That night, after my supper,

I sat in front of my first-floor woodstove and watched the trapped flames flicker and dance, knowing my home was safe.

But I was up on Timber-swamp Road, shivering in the late night cold, watching the hard gray in the east signal a slow-approaching dawn. I remembered how I talked to the county dispatcher, Norma Quentin, and how she hesitated when I asked her about this fire and Tate Burnham. The smell of the smoke was mixed with something else, a harsh, greasy smell, and I made my way farther up the hill, finding my way easily enough in the lights from the firetrucks and the police cruisers. Chief Parnell was there, with two of his officers, and I nudged past them, looking at the crest of the hill where the grass had burned away.

There was no wreckage there, no blackened timbers from a house or a barn. In the middle of the burnt-out grass patch was an oak tree, its trunk scorched by the flames. Next to the trunk was a gasoline can, turned on one side, its paint bubbled and smeared away. Wrapped around the base of the tree was a chain, and the chain ran down the hill a short way, where it ended up wrapped

around the legs of a charred carcass, which at first looked like a cow or a goat or a . . .

Only by turning my head quickly and stepping away was I able to avoid getting sick. I breathed through my mouth, not wanting to smell that horrible, greasy odor again. Chief Parnell came over to me and grabbed my arm, and we walked a bit, down the darkened road, until my head cleared.

The chief said, "Got here quick enough."

"My sources. You know that." I looked back up the hill, and just as quickly looked at the chief. "Who is it?"

The chief shrugged. "Not an official I.D., but based on what we know and who was reported missing last night, I'll have to say Tate Burnham."

"Tate Burnham . . ." I turned and saw the chain again, imagining what it must've been like, to be chained there and engulfed in flames, not being able to escape or even move. I looked back at the chief and noticed the firefighters and the two other Purmort police officers, standing in a loose circle, all staring at me.

I said, "Who do you think did this to him?"

Again that casual shrug, and though the sun was beginning to rise, I was feeling colder. "Himself, I imagine," the chief said, his voice even.

"Himself?" I demanded, my voice rising. "Chief, you're saying he did it to himself?"

The chief's eyes narrowed and he said, "That's exactly what I'm saying, Jerry. The man knew we had him nailed to the wall, knew he wasn't going to escape a guilty verdict, knew he could never live in these parts again. Me, I think—and I'm gonna tell the state police this—I think he came up here, depressed as hell, and he killed himself, just like those monks in Vietnam back in the sixties."

"Chief, the chain . . ."

The chief just raised an eyebrow. "He probably did it to himself, make sure he couldn't chicken out. Jerry, it makes sense, now, don't it?"

I tried to catch my breath and failed. My head seemed like it would burst, and I felt like grabbing the chief's shoulders for some reason. The firefighters and the police officers had stepped closer to me, still standing in that loose circle, and all of them were looking at me, and their expressions were all the same, a very cold expression, of a group or tribe looking at a dangerous outsider. For a moment I almost felt like laughing, remembering how suckered we had all been, at the so-called miracle as the townspeople lined up to pay for Tate Burnham's bail. Sure, out of the goodness of their hearts, to free

Tate Burnham from the grasp of the state and to bring him back to the town where he belonged. I remembered what the road agent, Wayne Ferguson, had said: We take care of our own here.

They certainly do. The group of firefighters and police officers were closer, and again I felt like laughing at the horror of it all. I could live here for another ten or twenty or thirty years, and never would I belong, never would I be a part of what went on here in Purmort, below the surface and behind the headlines. I looked at all

their faces, old and young, and they all looked like brothers.

I spoke up, loud enough so everyone could hear. "If you say so, but it's a pity, chief. A real pity, that he died this way."

There were some smiles given to me by the group after that, and in a minute or so, I began walking quickly back to my truck, and once I glanced behind me, and I was happy to see I was alone. I went into my truck and locked both doors and before starting the engine, I placed my head on the steering wheel and wept.

I had lost my home.

UNSOLVED

by
Guy Savant

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the January issue.

At this moment there is chaos in the colorful world of espionage. A top-secret document detailing the key to breaking the agent-contact identification code has disappeared. No one knows who should have what code word. Even more bewildering and dangerous is the fact that there's no way for agents to identify contacts and vice versa. Caught on assignment at the time the key disappeared were Alex, Bonnie, Bruce, Clyde, Craig, Ivan, Lucy, Mike, Scott, and Tim. Five of them had been sent to five different exotic cities (Bangkok, Bombay, Budapest, Baghdad, and Bucharest) to make contact with the other five who were stationed in them. In fact, one agent was so confused he became lost in one of Baghdad's chaotic bazaars; another agent reported later that she nearly mistook an organ grinder's monkey for her contact.

Fortunately (and also frustratingly), a few clues were located that should help clear up the confusion. No agent and his or her contact share the same initial. No agent or contact shares the same initial as his or her code word; only one was given a code word with the same number of letters as his name (he was a contact), and only one was sent to a city with the same number of letters as her name (she was an agent). And even as not one contact shares an initial with his fellow contacts, neither does any agent share an initial with his or her fellow agents.

But even these clues and the ones that follow will not be enough to restore order to the spy community. The key to the agent-contact identification code must be solved. Luckily enough, unless you're colorblind, the key can be found in the code words themselves, which are as follows:

<i>Snow</i>	<i>Alert</i>	<i>Grass</i>
<i>Pitch</i>	<i>Quick</i>	<i>True</i>
<i>Beet</i>	<i>Spoon</i>	<i>Market</i>
	<i>Lie</i>	

Can you, with all the information provided, determine each agent's and each contact's code word, who is to meet whom, and their rendezvous?

Here's hoping you succeed with flying colors!

1. The spy stationed in Budapest used the code word *Quick*.
2. Ivan was sent to either Bucharest or Baghdad.
3. Clyde's code word was not as long as his name; neither Clyde nor Craig has ever seen Bucharest.
4. Tim was contacted by an agent who used the code word *True*—not in Bangkok, where the agent's code word was *Snow*.
5. Mike, who was not Alex's contact, was in Baghdad.
6. The code word *Beet* was used in Bucharest.

See page 209 for the solution to the December puzzle.

A Meaningful Relationship

by C. J. Hursch

Reggie walked in just as I finished setting up an appointment with the police. His long face spelled trouble, but at that point, I didn't know how much.

"Coffee time," he squawked brightly. "Want me to get you some, Jane?"

"I've already had my shot of caffeine for the day," I told him.

"Do you mind," he asked with a woebegone look, "if I have mine here? I've just got to talk to somebody."

How could I refuse? He looked like a sorry tomcat in his dull black suit, wilted white collar, and modestly striped gray tie. Reggie had an office just down the hall from my detective setup where he plied the psychologist's trade for all it was worth. You'd know right away what his profession was because he always put out a lot of those hocus-pocus words some shrinks use to befuddle the rest of us about why we do what we do.

He often dropped in to my office to loosen his tie and try to be a human being. And because he amused me, I often let him. But right now I had other

things on my mind, namely the spate of jewelry store robberies that the police had called me in on.

"What's your problem?" I shot at him, not wanting to wait through a half hour of aimless chatter until he got to it.

He looked up, startled. "Does it show?" he asked. "I suppose you noticed my lowered affect."

"No. I noticed that you looked like you'd just lost your last friend," I told him.

"I may have," he said, nodding solemnly. "I can't find Violet."

"Not Violet, your purple passion!" I exclaimed, hardly able to smother a giggle.

Violet was at the other end of the universe from Reggie. She was curvy and vivacious, wore long drippy earrings, dozens of silver and gold bangles on her arms, and a large silver star pasted to her forehead. She was into witchcraft, and she had a riotous laugh that could knock the pigeons off the roof.

"She's probably deep in her coven issuing incantations," I answered without much sympathy.

"No," he assured me solemnly. "She only does that during the full moon, and that's long past. It's something else."

There were countless possibilities as to why the flamboyant Violet was unavailable to dour Reggie, but most of them would have shocked him silly as he sat there stiffly balancing his coffee cup on his bony knee. So I just tried to soothe him. "She'll probably call you soon," I said.

"No, she won't. She never calls me—she has a weak ego system," he said gravely. "We were supposed to get together last night, but I went to her apartment and got no answer. I even called at six this morning, and she's still not there. Look," he said, focusing his red-rimmed eyes on me, "does your private investigating work include finding a missing person?"

"Have you reported her missing to the police?" I asked.

"No. Should I?"

"I think that's best," I said, not wanting to run down all the red herrings that I was sure Violet could leave if she didn't want Reggie trailing after her.

"I'd be glad to pay you," he said.

"Let's not get into that yet. She might turn up any time. Tell you what," I said with a sudden inspiration for getting rid of him. "I'm headed for the

police station now. While I'm there, I'll check on anything that might have come in just to be sure nothing has happened to her. You might call around to her girlfriends and relatives and see if they know where she is."

That made him happier. He unwound his long legs, glanced at his watch, and hurried off. I had no intention of doing anything about her and, at that point, didn't think anyone needed to.

"The problem is," Ed Lucero said as I sat in his office in the police station, "that there is no consistent M.O. I've got a gut feeling that these burglaries are all connected, but I can't find the thread that might give us a clue."

"How do you know there is one?" I asked.

"There's got to be," Ed said doggedly as he shuffled the batch of files in front of him. Ed had been on the force a long time. He was a careful, thorough detective. Nothing flashy about him, he stuck with a case until he saw through every angle of it. He was also smart enough to call in other investigators—like myself—to give him new slants when he was stumped. And, except for a few lukewarm suspects, he was badly stumped on this one.

"We've got a sudden rash of jewel thefts. The witnesses we've got described the burglars differently in each incident. The approach is slightly different each time, but they steal good jewelry in broad daylight and it disappears fast—it never turns up at the pawnbrokers or fences. I'm sure there is a connection between these burglaries because the whole underworld doesn't suddenly turn to jewel theft just like that."

"What can I do to help?" I asked.

"I'd like you to question a couple of suspects. See if you can get anything out of them. Word on the street has it that they may be involved. But I haven't been able to dig anything helpful out of any of them. See what you can pick up."

As Ed led me through the main lobby to the interview room, I got a surprise. There, nervously perched on a bench in the main lobby, was Reggie's Violet. We had met a few times at my office, and I wasn't sure if she saw me but her head seemed to snap away from my direction as Ed and I approached.

"Do you know her?" I asked Ed softly as we went into the interrogating room.

He shook his head. "Never seen her before."

"What's she doing here?" I asked him.

"No idea. Is it important?"

"Probably not," I said as I shrugged and let it go.

Striking a disarming pose in the small stark room, I welcomed a young man named Cliff Dorgan who worked in a jewelry store that had been robbed. He had quit to take another job just two days before the store got hit. But his life seemed to be as open and clean as his countenance. I couldn't see any way to connect him with the burglary.

After that I tried to talk with one Bobby Colvin, an excitable youth whose eyes darted all over the room while the rest of his body twitched and hitched. The only thing I could be sure of about him was that he was in dire need of a controlled substance.

Next was a smooth-faced man in his early thirties named Gilbert Carver who said he had only been in town a few weeks. He was here to visit his mother, who was in a nursing home, and would be heading back to Detroit soon. He was a little tight-lipped, but otherwise courteous and cooperative. But there wasn't a thing I got out of him that connected him to the stolen jewelry.

I decided to check out Gilbert's story about his aged mother because I couldn't think of anything else to do and because his Detroit record indi-

cated he didn't always behave as his mother should have taught him to.

She was there at the nursing home all right. I introduced myself to the smiling gray-haired lady in a wheelchair that a nurse pushed in.

"Mrs. Carver, I'm here to see that you're getting good treatment," I began. She went on smiling. "Are you feeling well?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes!" she answered, and I noticed then that the smile included everyone in the room, as well as the walls, ceiling, and floor.

"Do your children come to see you often?" When she nodded affirmatively, I asked, "How many children do you have?"

"Seven," she answered with a broad smile.

"And can you tell me their names?"

"Yes. There's George, Warren, Gladys, Esther, Judith, Marion, Terrence . . ." she paused.

"Do you have a son named Gilbert?"

"Oh yes, Gilbert. Such a nice boy."

"But that's eight children," I pointed out.

"Yes, eight," she nodded pleasantly.

"Can you tell me their names again?" I asked.

"Sure. Gilbert, Nancy, Everett, George, Solomon, Rita, John,

Henry, and . . . and . . ."

I knew then I had struck out. They told me at the desk that a son answering Gilbert's description had visited her frequently in recent weeks. They said she also had several other children who came, as well as some adult grandchildren; they weren't sure how many. So much for Mrs. Carver. Time had evidently dimmed her memory as to who was which, but she apparently did have a large and devoted family. No wonder she smiled so much.

It wasn't until I got back late that afternoon and passed his closed office door that I thought again about Reggie and his rambling rose.

Oops! I said to myself as I slunk by quickly. Hope he's made contact with Vanishing Violet by now. But just in case he hadn't, I quietly dashed in and out of my own office and slipped down the back stairway. I couldn't see that it would calm his nerves any if I told him I'd spotted her at the police station.

At two A.M. my phone wrenched me out of a good night's sleep. Reggie's scrappy voice came on as soon as I answered. "Jane! The police are searching my apartment," he screamed in terror.

"What for?" I asked.

"I don't know. They won't tell me. Could you come over right

away? You work with police. Maybe you can handle them. I don't know what to do."

What could I say? He lived close by. I got there in minutes. But it was already too late. I recognized the burly figure of Ed Lucero coming down the steps of the building.

"Hi, Jane. We found it," Ed said to me cheerily, just as though I should know what he was talking about.

"You did?" I asked, just as though I knew what we were both talking about.

"Not all, but I saw enough from recent jewelry store burglaries to cinch the case. Come on back to the station and I'll tell you about it," Ed said in his big, friendly way.

My mouth was already opening with a question, but I gaped even wider when I saw them leading poor Reggie out in handcuffs. Hideous green and yellow checked pajamas stuck out below his coat, and leather mules flapped on his reluctant feet. He stopped protesting when he spotted me.

"Help me!" he shrieked in a wail that pierced the night as they loaded him into a police car.

"I think you may have the wrong man," I said to Ed.

"But he's got the goods," Ed said.

"That's one thing I don't understand," I answered. "The

other thing is: what made you look in his apartment?"

Ed explained that Reggie's cleaning lady, who had read about all the jewelry store robberies, called in and announced that she'd found too many little packages of sparkly stuff hidden in odd places in his apartment.

On the way downtown I told Ed what I knew of the panicky shrink they had taken into custody. He agreed that Reggie's biography didn't seem to fit with robbing jewelry stores.

"Somebody must have set him up," Ed concluded. "But who, and why?"

It was then that I remembered seeing Violet at the police station earlier that day. When I mentioned this to Ed he said, "Yeah. After you asked me about her I found out why she was there. She was waiting for that guy Gilbert Carver. I guess she's his girlfriend because she walked out with him after you questioned him. They were having a big argument."

"She's the only possible link between Reggie and this case," I pointed out. "Maybe you'd better pick her up."

"Done," Ed said, reaching for his phone.

I went on home after arranging for Reggie to be released as painlessly as possible. Ed said he'd call me when they brought Violet in.

Late the next morning, I was not surprised when Reggie, looking more haggard than usual, floated into my office. I could see he was still in shock.

"It was awful," he breathed heavily as he sank into a chair. "They treated me like a criminal."

"You were caught with the loot," I reminded him.

"But it wasn't mine," he said. Then he calmed down and reverted to his usual style. "It is extremely deflating to one's ego, you know, especially if one's response system is unaccustomed to unwarranted stress."

"How do you suppose the jewelry got hidden in your place?" I asked.

"I can't imagine. I'm away a lot. Anyone could have sneaked in and put it there, but I don't know why."

"What about Violet?" I asked. "Any chance that . . ."

"Oh, no! How would she have access to stolen . . . loot?" he demanded. "Why would you suspect her?"

"She wears a lot of jewelry, for one thing. How well do you know her?" I asked. But I was unprepared for the rush of color that rose up from his starchy collar.

"Why, uh . . ." he said, with some indignation and so much embarrassment that it told me more than I had intended to find out.

"I mean," I said with a quick wave of my hand to get him on another track, "what do you know about her background?"

"She doesn't have much background," he said innocently. "I know that her mother is in a nursing home here, but I think that's all the family she has."

He got my attention with that. "Wait a minute. What nursing home? What's her mother's name?" I demanded.

He thought for a minute. "I don't know the answer to either question."

"Does she have a lot of brothers and sisters?" I asked.

"She's never mentioned any."

Assorted facts ran loosely through my mind, but they didn't fit together until much later.

That afternoon, I went down to the station to interview another unlikely suspect from whom I got nothing. Then I stopped by Ed's desk.

"Several store owners have identified the pieces we found at your shrink friend's place last night," he said. "But that's all the progress we've made."

"What about Violet? Did she provide any useful information?" I asked.

"Haven't been able to locate her yet."

"Well, she was here yesterday afternoon, and you said she walked out with Gilbert after-

wards, so why not pick up Gilbert again, and . . . ”

“I thought of that, but we can’t find him either.”

I told Ed about my visit to the nursing home, and what Reggie had told me about Violet’s mother’s being in one.

At that point Ed’s phone rang. It was a short conversation, but before he put the receiver down, I knew the news was bad.

“They’ve found Violet,” he said in a flat voice. I waited expectantly until he added, “Her body was stuffed in a Dumpster. She’s been dead since last night.”

I winced. Poor Reggie was going to have another blow.

“And her mother is Mrs. Carver at the nursing home,” Ed continued. “I guess we’d better go and see her. She’s got to be notified of her daughter’s death. And maybe she can tell us more about all this.”

I doubted it, but at least, I thought, her mental condition might mercifully spare her from the full realization of what had happened to her daughter.

We went to Mrs. Carver’s private room but the door was locked. Knocking brought no results, so we found a nurse who helped hunt for her.

“She’s here somewhere,” the nurse assured us. “I saw her wheeling down the hallway not more than half an hour ago.”

When the sun room and patio

revealed no Mrs. Carver, the nurse acquired a worried look, pulled out a batch of keys, and went at the door to Mrs. Carver’s room. As it swung open, she gasped, and so did Ed and I.

Signs of a hasty exit were everywhere: drawers hung open, the bathrobe Mrs. Carver had worn yesterday was flung on the floor, the mattress was half off the bed, and there were several empty brown paper bags strewn around the floor.

“She couldn’t have done this by herself—she’s practically helpless,” the nurse cried.

Then things began to click in my head. I ran toward the front of the building. We were on the second floor, and as I started down the stairway, I glanced out the window. There was Mrs. Carver, hurriedly stuffing two small suitcases into the back of a cab and scrambling in after them.

Ed and the nurse, who were right behind me, saw her too. “Is that her?” Ed asked.

I nodded as the astonished nurse said, “For two months I’ve been pushing her around in that wheelchair and she can walk as well as I can!”

“Where’s the nearest phone?” Ed barked.

The nurse quickly led him to a small, empty office where he called the taxi company for the destination of the cab that had made the pickup at the nursing

home. When he found out it was headed for the airport, he called his office, briefly filled in an officer, then told him to tail the cab, and keep Mrs. Carver in sight after she got out.

His police officer's eye had picked up an amazing amount of detail about her clothing and appearance. He gave all this again to the airport security office, asking them to detain anybody she met after she got there. He was particularly interested in the two small bags she was carrying.

Then he and I hopped into his car and headed for the airport, hoping we might at least be in time to catch the last act in this drama of the smiling old lady who had suddenly recovered her lost youth. Ed tuned in his radio, and we advised airport security of where the cab was entering the terminal so they could have a reception committee on hand if Mrs. Carver met anyone there.

We were in luck. She got out of the cab tailed by several of Ed's men and rushed in to a ticket counter. Then she hurried down the concourse, the two bags clutched tightly in her hands, and met a group of five of her "children," all grown men. Just as the boarding call sounded for her plane, another man and a woman joined the group and all headed for the gate.

At that point, airport security and Ed's men moved in and surrounded the happy family. A few bolted, but were quickly caught. By then, Ed and I had arrived at the terminal and headed down the concourse to the gate where the family gathering had gone sour.

We immediately spotted familiar faces: Gilbert was there, as was the nervous, twitchy Bob Colvin, and Cliff Dorgan, the former jewelry store employee. Ed noted others whose acquaintance he had made in the course of his work. "Mother" Carver was holding forth in some of the gamiest language I had ever heard. Gone were her engaging smile and her vacant stare. In fluent street language she reviewed the stupidity of some of her "children," the calumny of the police, and various breeding problems of the rest of humanity.

One of Ed's men was holding both her bags, and this piqued her no end. She kept announcing her legal rights of privacy and other irrelevancies. We were sure that much of the remaining stolen jewelry was there.

"Do we book the whole group for burglary, captain?" one of Ed's men asked as we approached.

Ed nodded. "That and murder," he answered. "Somebody here decided to prune the family tree last night."

At that several handcuffed individuals started to scream denials and point at Gilbert.

"Mother" Carver silenced them all with some choice verbs from her vast vocabulary of juicy expressions.

Later, by questioning each person separately, we found that they were all unrelated except by their interest in other people's jewelry. We also learned that Violet had started to set up a spinoff business for herself by stashing some of the loot away instead of turning it in to Mrs. Carver at the nursing home. She intended to use it as a kind of dowry so that she and Reggie could run off to a tropical isle and live happily ever after—after she got Reggie to agree to this plan, which she hadn't yet shared with him. Apparently her feeling for him was true love after all—in her fashion.

Mrs. Carver had become suspicious of the short returns Violet was bringing in and had instructed the others to put pressure on her to reveal her hiding place. Gilbert, the others agreed, had pressed too hard, forcing the group to make a run for fresh territory.

When it was all over, my

worst problem was how to break all this to Reggie before it flashed on the front page of every newspaper. But I needn't have worried.

After my gentle explanation to him of the basic facts, he sat in my office staring straight ahead and not blinking.

"My emotional responses are a bit flattened by all that has happened," he said stiffly. "Please understand if I don't openly exhibit the proper affect. In time I'll adjust although the trauma will leave an indelible mark on my psyche."

I concluded that he meant that it had hit him flat in the face and he needed a while to get over the jolt. That Violet was actually part of the gang and had never told him her real occupation seemed to preoccupy him most.

"It must have been due to her unhappy childhood," he said.

"What happened to her as a child?" I inquired gently.

"I don't know. She never mentioned it," he admitted. "But she must have suffered an early-life trauma or she wouldn't have tried to compensate for it with a life of crime," he concluded, rounding out his circular logic.

Of the Five Who Came

by Fletcher Flora

I think now, looking back, that I had a feeling of trouble from the moment they came, but I had no feeling at first that the trouble was death.

They came early in the afternoon of a day in May. There were five of them. Two pairs and a single. They came in a 1958 Chrysler station wagon with flaring fins and a Kansas City license and a luggage rack on top. Behind the wagon, on a trailer, was an inboard motorboat, sleek and polished and with a look of power. The wagon stopped in the drive behind my cottage. I went outside and started toward it, and a man got out from under the wheel and started toward the cottage, and we met between starting places.

He was a tall man with a hard, square face and heavy shoulders and big hands with long spatulate fingers. The nails of the fingers were manicured, and the hands looked fleshy and soft; actually they were very strong, and they felt, I noticed when we shook hands, like expensive and pliant cowhide.

He looked familiar. I had a notion he was someone I should

remember from another time and place. His name was, I thought, Ira Boniface, for that was the name of the man who had reserved three cottages, and I had never seen him or heard of him before to my knowledge. He was wearing a soft cloth hat with little air vents in each side above the band, and a light leather jacket over a red and brown plaid shirt. His trousers were brown, some kind of tough twill, and his shoes were darker brown and pebble-grained with moccasin toes and thick soles.

"Welcome to Laird's Point," I said. "I'm John Laird."

"Thanks," he said. "I'm Dan Grimes."

He said it as if he expected to be recognized, and he usually was. He would have been recognized, by name if not by sight, by almost anyone in the state, and by many people outside it. The boss of the dominant political party, he had never run for office or been appointed to one, but he was the man who controlled the men who did, and he exercised an incredible power and authority that had been developed through violence and

a kind of magical persuasive-ness and managed to survive by a complex system of alliances and loyalties and threats that no one could quite analyze or understand.

"I was expecting a Mr. Boniface," I said.

"Ira's in the wagon," he said.

He turned half around toward the wagon from the hips, and this was apparently a sign for the others to move, for they got out of the wagon and came toward us, two women and two men. One of the men was as tall as Grimes, but not so heavy in the shoulders nor quite so broad in the hips, and he moved like a big cat. The other man was short and slight by comparison, though not much shorter or slighter than I, and there was about him an odd and incongruous effect of force and frailty that made you instantly aware of him. Both of the women were attractive, each in her own way. One of them was a brunette with a clear brown skin, and the other was a blonde with a clear brown skin.

Grimes began without preface to introduce the four, and it turned out that the big cat-like man was Ira Boniface, the one who had made the reservations, and the brunette was his wife and was called Rita. She had the kind of looks that hit you at once and hit you

hard. She was wearing a red cashmere sweater tucked into the waistband of a pair of fancy black pants that fit her a little looser than her clear brown skin.

The other couple, the slight man and the blonde woman, were Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Quintin. Her Christian name was Laura. Her head was bare in the bright sun, her hair so pale that it seemed in the light to be almost white. It was sleeked back without a part and held in a knot on her neck, and it seemed naturally the pale color that it was. She was very slender, almost thin, and she had the special and rather gaunt seductiveness of a high-fashion model. She nodded to me without speaking or smiling, and afterward she looked immediately away, down the slope behind me to the blue lake glittering in the sun. In her face, I thought, there was a kind of petulance that was not actually an expression but only the suggestion or shadow of one.

After the introductions, I pointed out the three cottages that had been reserved for them. They stood in a line along the lake shore about twenty feet apart and about fifty feet up the slope from the water, and they were the best three of the four that I had to rent. The fourth

cottage was considered not so good because it was farther up the slope with the others between it and the lake, and it was not at this time either reserved or rented.

Grimes moved off toward the cottages, the others following, and I unloaded the luggage and tackle boxes from the rack on top of the Chrysler and separated it according to the identification tags. While I was doing this, I kept watching to see how the cottages were claimed. Ira and Rita Boniface went into the first, Grimes into the second, and the Quintins into the third, the last on the far end of the line near the point.

I gathered up the Quintins' luggage, a leather bag and a metal tackle box and a long aluminum rod case, and carried it down past the first cottage and the second cottage to the third cottage on the end. I kicked against the screen door lightly, and someone said to come in, and I pushed the door open with a shoulder and went inside and set the luggage down on the concrete floor of the screened-in porch. Laura Quintin was sitting in a chair on the porch, staring out through the screen and down through the scrub oaks on the slope to the lake. Jerome Quintin came to the door and stood leaning against the jamb.

"Thanks," he said, looking at the luggage.

"I think this is all of it," I said.

"Bag, tackle box, rods," he said. "That's it."

There was a feeling of suspension on the porch, an uneasy hiatus between something before and something that would come after, and I had arrived, I felt, between two parts of a conversation that had been bad and might become worse.

"If there's anything you need, let me know," I said.

"We'll do that," Quintin said.

He shoved a hand into a pocket and looked uncertain, but apparently he decided that a tip would not be appropriate in my case, and after a moment he pulled the hand out of the pocket and put it behind him.

"Do you own this place?" Laura Quintin asked suddenly.

She did not look at me and did not sound as if she really cared if I owned the place or not. Her voice was quiet and curiously flat.

"The bank and I," I said.

"Do you live here by yourself?"

"Yes. Except for the guests."

"I wonder why."

"It's a pretty good way to live," I said. "A man's life is pretty much his own."

"I like a man who lives his own life," she said.

She wasn't really speaking to me. She was speaking to Jerome Quintin, her husband. Glancing at him, I saw that his face had suddenly set in stiff lines, his mouth pinched and white at the corners.

"I hope you enjoy your stay," I said.

Neither of them answered, and I opened the screen door and went out and back up to the Chrysler and got another load of luggage and carried it to the middle cottage where Dan Grimes had gone. He heard me at the door and came out and held it open for me.

"Thanks," I said.

"I should have carried it over myself," he said.

"It's all right," I said. "It's part of the service."

He had taken off his hat and leather jacket and looked relaxed and happy in his plaid shirt.

"There's a bottle of scotch in the bag," he said. "Have a drink with me?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I've got some work to do."

"There must be a lot of work to running a place like this. Do you do it all yourself?"

"Most of it."

"How are the fish biting now?"

"Fine. Lots of crappie and bass. The wall-eye are coming on."

"That's what I heard. A friend

of mine was down here last week. He recommended your place."

"Thank him for me when you see him."

"I'll try my luck after awhile. Toward evening."

"Evening's a good time," I said.

He sounded natural and friendly, and I found myself liking him. I guess that's why he'd been able to do all the things he'd done, because he had a natural and friendly way and a lot of people besides me had found themselves liking him until it was too late to know better. I said so long and went back for the last of the luggage and took it to the first cottage. On the way, I saw Ira Boniface standing at the edge of the lake at the foot of the slope with his back to the cottage. I pushed the screen door open and put the luggage on the floor of the porch. Rita Boniface asked from inside who it was, and I answered that it was John Laird with the luggage.

"Would you mind bringing it inside?" she said.

"Not at all," I said.

I picked it up again and carried it into the sitting-sleeping room and set it on the floor by a studio couch. Rita Boniface was lying on her back on the double bed smoking a cigarette. She turned her head toward me

and smiled lazily and breathed a thin cloud of smoke.

"What's to do around here besides fishing?" she said.

"Not much," I said. "It's a fishing camp."

"You look like a clever young man," she said. "Maybe you can think of something."

"I'll try to make your stay as pleasant as possible," I said.

She breathed smoke in and out of her lungs and laughed softly. The laugh had the effect of riding out on the smoke. Down below on the lake, a small cabin cruiser turned out of the main channel and around the point into the arm in front of the cottages. It pulled in slowly beside my gasoline dock, and its horn sounded twice.

"Excuse me," I said. "Someone needs gas."

"Come again when you can stay longer," she said.

I went down the slope to the gasoline dock and filled the tank of the small cruiser and talked for a while with the pilot and then stood on the dock and watched the cruiser turn in the narrow arm and move back out into the channel. In spite of the sun and the quiet lake, I had a feeling that it was a bad day.

Later in the afternoon Dan Grimes came over to my cottage. He was carrying a spinning rod and reel in one hand,

a green metal tackle box in the other.

"You going out?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "Can you suggest a good place?"

"It depends on what you're after."

"Bass."

"You'd better go up to the Gravois Arm. You know where it is?"

"Yes."

"You want me to help you launch your boat?"

"No, thanks. Ira can help. Where's the best place to launch it?"

"Just follow the road past the cottages. It runs right down to the water near the point. You'd better back down all the way. There's no good place to turn."

"All right. I'll need enough gas to get around to the pump."

"I've got some here in a can," I said.

I gave him the can, and he went out and turned the Chrysler in the drive and started slowly backward down the road with the trailer in advance. As he passed the first cottage, Ira Boniface came out with his rod and tackle and got into the Chrysler while it continued to move. I went down to the gasoline pump and waited, and pretty soon they came around the point in the boat. The motor of the boat sounded sweet and strong. It was not a big boat,

but it was the best you could buy of its kind and had cost quite a lot of money. I filled the tank and watched the boat move out into the channel and then went back up to the cottages to check the wood boxes.

The days that May were mostly clear and warm, but the evenings and nights generally got pretty cool, and sometimes it was pleasant to have a small fire in the fireplace. So I checked the wood boxes, and there was enough wood in all of them for that night. When I reached the last one and looked into it Laura Quintin came out onto the screened porch and spoke.

"May we please have some ice?" she said.

"There ought to be a couple of trays in the refrigerator," I said.

"There isn't any. Someone left the trays on the cabinet."

"Sorry. I'll get some and bring it right down."

"Thank you."

I went back to my own cottage and put a couple dozen cubes in a plastic bag and returned. Approaching the Quintins' cottage, I heard Laura Quintin's voice raised in anger, but in spite of volume and anger it retained, or acquired, a cold quality of deadly calm. It was somehow in accord with her pale reserve. She was the kind of woman, I thought, who

would never in anger become excessively emotional and vulgar. She would become, as she was now, bitterly cold and incisive.

"The trouble with you," she said, "is that you have an unfortunate combination of qualities. You are brilliant and charming and weak. Because you have no guts, you're a perfect fool."

"Thanks for your opinion," Jerome Quintin said. "I'm happy to know precisely what you think of me."

"Not at all. I'm delighted to tell you."

"Would you care to learn, in return, what I think of you?"

"I don't think I particularly care any longer."

"Nevertheless, I want to tell you. Just for my own satisfaction. You have, my dear, no scope, no imagination, and not, I suspect, much intelligence. Because you want to be a non-entity, you want to make me one also."

"You see? You have proved your weakness beautifully with your own words. Is being a non-entity the only alternative to what you're becoming? For heaven's sake, can't you exploit your own talents in your own way for your own good?"

I had stopped outside the screen door, and I was suddenly aware that I was deliberately

listening. I was a little ashamed, but not much. In the interval of silence that now fell, I knocked quickly and was told by Jerome Quintin to come in. I opened the door and crossed the porch and went into the cottage and put the bag of cubes on a table.

"I hope these will hold you until your own have time to freeze," I said.

"That's more than enough," Quintin said. "Thanks very much."

Two bottles were sitting on the cabinet by the sink in the kitchen area. He took three glasses from a shelf above and put ice cubes in the glasses.

"You'll have a drink with us, of course," he said.

"No, thanks," I said. "I'd better get back."

"Nonsense. Surely you can take time for a drink. We'd be pleased to have you join us, wouldn't we, Laura?"

"Yes, of course," Laura Quintin said. "Please do."

She said it promptly and nicely, but it obviously made no difference to her, one way or the other. The quality of anger was no longer in her voice, but it was cold and rigidly contained.

"All right," I said. "I'll have one with you."

"Good. Bourbon or scotch?"

"Bourbon."

"Straight?"

"A little tap water, please," I answered.

He poured bourbon over ice in one of the glasses and added water. He repeated the operation with the other glasses, using scotch instead of bourbon. Afterward he distributed the drinks, and Laura took hers first and swallowed some of it instantly without ceremony. I lifted my own in a small salute to Quintin for his hospitality. It was a strong drink of good whisky.

"I think," Laura said, "that I'll drink a great many of these tonight. It seems to me like a good night to drink lots and lots of scotch."

She drained her glass quickly, as if it were so much water, and got up immediately and began mixing another drink. Jerome Quintin laughed and shrugged it off lightly. I had a feeling that he was furious, but it was only a feeling without any evidence of expression in his face or voice.

"Laura doesn't particularly care for fishing trips," he said.

"He's wrong," Laura said. "It is only this particular fishing trip that I don't care for."

"Laura's feeling sorry for herself at the moment," Quintin said. "You must excuse her."

"He's wrong again," she said. "It's him I'm feeling sorry for."

They were talking *through*

me again, as they had before, and I didn't like it. I took another swallow of my drink and thought I'd finish it quickly and get out of there.

"Will you tell me something, Mr. Laird?" Quintin said.

"If I can," I said.

"Do you expect to become governor of this state?"

"No."

"If you did become governor of this state, would you consider it an accomplishment of some merit?"

"Yes."

"Well, it so happens that I do expect to become governor of this state, Mr. Laird. In a short while, as you'll see, I shall become attorney general and in due time after that I shall become governor."

"Congratulations."

He had finished his drink and was fixing another. Watching the pair of them, Jerome and Laura Quintin in their queer cold conflict, I became aware of something that I'd missed before. They'd been working on the scotch warm, before the ice came. They were both already a little drunk, quietly and bitterly.

"Thank you, Mr. Laird," he said. "It may interest you to know, however, that Laura does not share your feeling about the significance of being governor. Would you believe it? She seems

to feel that it would somehow be degrading to be governor."

"He'll never be governor," Laura said.

"Of course I'll be governor. It's all set, Mr. Laird. Long range planning, you know."

"No. He'll never be attorney general, and he'll never be governor. Dan Grimes will be attorney general, and Dan Grimes will be governor. Jerome Quintin will be nothing."

"She's talking too much," Quintin said. "You'll please pardon her, Mr. Laird."

She drank from her glass and looked at me levelly over the rim.

"Yes," she said, "you'll please pardon me, Mr. Laird. I've been attending a wake for a long time, and I'm a little drunk on scotch and grief. I'm in mourning for a man I knew once and loved. A young lawyer I helped put through law school. He was brilliant, and I thought he had integrity, and I admired him in addition to loving him, but he died. He died of corruption, and he's dead, and he'll be buried in the state capitol."

Quintin stood looking into his glass until she'd finished. Then, without looking at her or me, he simply walked out of the room onto the porch and stood looking out through the screen and the gathering shadows be-

neath the trees to the darkening surface of the lake.

"I'd better go," I said. "Thanks very much for the drink."

"You're quite welcome," Laura Quintin said.

I set my glass carefully on the table and went out behind Quintin. He didn't turn or speak as I opened the screen door quietly and left.

As I crossed in front of the Boniface cottage, Rita Boniface spoke to me from the shadows. I stopped and looked up and saw her dimly on the other side of the screen.

"Come in and have a drink with me," she said.

"I just had a drink," I said.

"Come in and have another."

"If you don't mind, I won't."

"I do mind, however. If you just had a drink, you must have had it with my dreary friends, the Quintins. I demand equal consideration."

"As a paying guest," I said, "I guess you're entitled to it."

I went up onto the porch. She was standing there in the shadows, but when I entered she turned and went inside, and I followed.

"You don't sound as if you like the Quintins much," I said.

"You're wrong," she said. "I don't like them any. Not one bit."

"To me," I said, "they seem

like a reasonably nice couple having a little reasonably normal trouble."

"Do you think so?" she said. "How tolerant of you. Never mind, though. The bottle's on the cabinet."

Beside the bottle was the glass she'd been using. Two small pieces of ice were floating in the bottom in about a quarter of an inch of water. I emptied the glass in the sink and I rinsed it and made a fresh drink in it. I mixed another for myself in another glass, and then she came over to me, moving out of the light of a small lamp into the fringe shadows of the kitchen area. Taking her glass and drinking from it, she made a face and immediately poured some of the liquid into the sink. She filled the glass again from the bottle.

"You make a very poor drink, Mr. Laird," she said.

"Sorry," I said.

"Will you have a little more whisky in yours?"

"No, thanks. This suits me."

"Really? I can't understand how anyone can tolerate a weak drink. A good strong drink is what I like."

"I see it is."

"You needn't look concerned, however. It's perfectly all right. I have a remarkable capacity for alcohol."

"I'm glad to know it."

"It's kind of a gift or something. Some people have a capacity for it, and some people don't, and you'd be surprised who some of the people are who don't. Do you realize that it's practically impossible to judge a person's capacity from his appearance?"

"I've never thought about it."

"It is, I assure you. Take Dan Grimes, for instance. You wouldn't think a man so big and strong and important as Dan would have practically no capacity at all for alcohol, but it's true. That's why he never drinks except when he's with friends where it won't make any difference. He always gets drunk almost immediately, and the next thing you know he's getting sick and passing out. What I mean is, he's susceptible. Are you susceptible, Mr. Laird?"

"I don't drink much."

"How unfortunate. It might make you more entertaining if you did. Are you susceptible to anything else in particular?"

She was standing very close to me, and I could smell the astringent sweetness of her perfume, and feel on my face as she talked the moist warmth of her breath. All at once she put an arm around my neck and put her lips on mine, kissing me slowly. There was a suggestion of a taunt in the way she took her time. I stood quietly with

the glass in my right hand, the left hand empty behind her back and carefully not touching her, and after awhile she stepped back past the empty hand and leaned against the cabinet and began to laugh softly as if she were genuinely amused.

"You are also a very poor kisser, Mr. Laird," she said. "You make a poor drink, and you kiss a poor kiss."

"I guess I just have no talent," I said.

"It's possible. On the other hand, it's possible that you're merely undeveloped. You might improve with experience."

"I'll think about it," I said.

From the lake came the strong, sweet sound of a motorboat moving pretty fast. The sound moved from the main channel past the point and into the arm.

"It's Ira and Dan," Rita Boniface said.

"Sounds like it," I said.

I finished my drink and set the glass on the table. Turning toward the door, I saw clearly in the light of the lamp something I had not seen before. It was a shoulder harness, complete with .38 automatic, and it was lying in a casual way across the foot of the bed like nothing more than a discarded shirt. I stopped and stared at it, feeling a cold and heavy congealing of the uneasiness that

had been gathering inside me ever since the arrival of these odd people that I did not understand and did not like. I wished that they had not come, or that they would, having come, go away again at once.

"What a pretty toy," I said.

"The gun? It's Ira's."

"Is it part of his ordinary equipment?"

"It is when he goes anywhere with Dan Grimes, and he's going somewhere with Dan practically all the time."

"You mean he's Grimes's bodyguard?"

"That's one of the things he is. Ira's a number of things that might surprise you. He's a capable guy."

"I got that impression."

"He's a very capable guy, and he's mine. Don't be fooled because I try to entertain myself when I'm bored. Ira's number one."

"With you and Grimes both?"

"That's right. With me and Dan and others too. As I said, where Dan goes, Ira usually goes." She paused, and I could hear her breathing, the sound of it suddenly slow and deep and measured in the room. "Maybe soon," she said softly, as if I were no longer there and she were speaking only to herself, "Dan will go somewhere without Ira, and there will only be Ira left."

"What?" I said.

"Nothing," she said. "I was just thinking."

The boat had pulled up to the dock, and I went outside and walked a few steps down the slope and waited. Dan Grimes and Ira Boniface came up the slope toward me. Grimes was walking a little in advance, and he was carrying a metal stringer with half a dozen bass hanging from it. He held the string up for me to see, and it was plain that he was feeling exhilarated by his luck.

"What do you think of these?" he said.

"They're beauties," I said.

They looked as if they'd weigh about three to five pounds each. There were two white bass and four black bass.

"You knew what you were talking about, all right," he said. "The second cast I made, I got a good strike."

"Did they give you a good fight?"

"Yes," he said, "they fought hard."

Rita Boniface had come after me out of the cottage. She lit a cigarette and stood looking at the bass without enthusiasm.

"I'm getting hungry," she said.

"We'll go get something to eat," Grimes said. He turned back to me. "Where's a good place to go, Laird? From now

on, I'm taking your advice on everything."

"There's a place just where you turned off the highway onto the lake road," I said. "They have good Kansas City steaks. Charcoal broiled."

"Fine," Grimes said. "How's a KC charcoal broiled steak sound, Rita?"

"It sounds good," Rita said. "Let's go get it."

She turned and started up the slope to the cottage, and Ira Boniface went after her.

"I'll clean your bass and put them in the freezer," I said.

"Will you do that?" Grimes handed me the string. "I'd appreciate it."

"It's nothing," I said. "Part of the service."

"Next time anyone wants to know a good place to fish, I'll know where to tell him."

"That's what I like to hear," I said.

He went up the slope at an angle to his own cottage. There was a big stump of an oak on the slope between the cottage he was in and the one occupied by the Quintins. I used the stump for cleaning fish for guests, and now I got a knife and a scaler and cleaned the bass on the stump. I had just finished with the last bass when Grimes and the others came out of the cottages and drove away in the Chrysler wagon. It was

almost as dark then as it would get, and there was a bright moon rising out of the lake.

They came back about ten and went into Grimes's cottage. A little later I went down the slope to the dock and sat on the bench in the moonlight. It was a wonderfully clear, cool night, the air filled with scents and stirring with small sounds, and I sat there for a long time on the bench, but I was unable to feel any of the good things a man should feel on that kind of night.

Someone in the cottage turned on a portable radio and tuned in a d. j. program. The music was very bad and very loud, and the talk and laughter became louder in competition with the bad music. They were having quite a party up there. I was glad the fourth cottage was unoccupied, because otherwise I might have had a complaint about the noise, which would have created a problem.

I kept sitting on the bench on the dock until it got to be midnight, and then I got up and walked along the edge of the lake to the point. I stood on the point for quite a long time. I could hear now and then, out in the water, the splash of a leaping fish, and in the trees across the arm along a ridge, a loon and an owl. After awhile I

turned and started up the slope at an angle toward the cottages. In the middle cottage the party was still going on, but the laughter and talk had become sporadic and not so loud as before, and it was apparent that things were coming slowly to an end. Among the trees on the slope, it was very dark. In the Quintins' cottage, the first I reached, I could hear faintly a harsh, aspirate sound of deep breathing. I was not more than two feet from the porch, and I stopped and looked inside, but it was too dark to see anything, and I stood there for a minute listening to the breathing, which was suddenly quieter and hardly audible. I took a step backward to turn and leave, and my foot came down on a dead branch. The branch cracked sharply, and someone spoke instantly beyond the dark doorway. It was the voice of Laura Quintin.

"Who's there?" she said.

"It's John Laird," I said.

"Oh. I'm glad you've come along, Mr. Laird. I could use some help." Her voice sounded tired and curiously flat.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"Will you come in, please?"

I went up across the porch and into the cottage. Dimly in the darkness, I could see Laura Quintin standing beside an easy chair near the bed. In the chair was the slumped figure of a

man who was, from his size, either Dan Grimes or Ira Boniface.

"It's Dan Grimes," she said. "He's passed out."

"What's he doing in your cottage?"

"He got sick at the party and went outside. Afterward he came in here and passed out in the chair. I just found him a few minutes ago." Her curiously flat voice had suddenly a thin edge of disgust. "He always gets drunk and sick when he tries to drink."

I had been aware of something unpleasant in the air of the room, and I recognized it now for the faint and sour stench of vomit. Grimes, in his sickness, had soiled his shirt.

"Do you want me to get him back to his own cottage?" I said.

"No. Just help me put him on the bed. He can spend the night here."

"What about you?"

"Jerry and I can take his cottage."

"You needn't help move him. I can do it alone."

"No. You're kind enough to help at all. Just take his feet, please."

"He's a heavy man. You'd better let me do it alone."

"I'm quite capable, thank you. I'm really much stronger than I look."

As if to settle the matter

without any more delay, she leaned over the chair and slipped her hands under Grimes's slack arms at the shoulders.

"You've got the heavy end," I said. "Come take the feet."

"I'm quite all right."

So I took his feet, and we carried him between us to the bed and put him on it. She must have been, as she claimed, much stronger than she looked, for he was very heavy, dead weight, and she carried him well. We left him on the bed and went out onto the porch. I offered her a cigarette, which she took. In the light of the match that I struck for her, her face looked pale and slightly drawn, set in lines of fastidious distaste.

"Thank you for helping me," she said.

"You're welcome," I said. "I only wonder why you bothered with him."

"He was drunk. I put him on the bed, that's all."

"Your bed. In your cottage. It will be an inconvenience, at least."

"No inconvenience is too great to suffer for Dan Grimes. Haven't you heard? People will do anything to gain his favor. If you don't believe me, ask Jerry."

"You don't approve of Grimes?"

"He's an unclean animal,"

she said, "who corrupts everyone he touches."

She spoke quietly with no inflection of anger. It was as if anger had burned itself out in its own excesses, leaving only a kind of sodden acceptance and bitterness. I said good night and turned to leave, and she spoke again.

"Please don't go," she said.

I stopped and turned back. She lifted a hand, touched me on the arm, dropped the hand again to her side. The gesture was a kind of appeal.

"It's late," I said. "It's almost one o'clock."

"I couldn't possibly sleep," she said. "I feel as if I'll never sleep again. I'd be grateful if you'd stay with me. I don't think I could bear being alone."

"Your husband will be looking for you."

"No. He's been drinking heavily. He'll go to sleep just as soon as the others leave. I'll go tell him to stay in Dan's cottage for the rest of the night. Will you wait for me?"

"I'll wait."

We went outside together, off the porch, and I waited in the darkness under the trees while she went alone into the middle cabin. The radio was not playing. I could hear no more laughing, no talking. The party, I thought, was over. In about

three minutes Laura Quintin returned.

"All right?" I said.

"All right."

"Shall we go down to the dock?"

"No. I think I'd like some coffee. Is there someplace we can go?"

"The places on the highway are closed by this time. There's an all-night restaurant in the nearest town."

"Will you take me there?"

"If your husband doesn't mind."

"He doesn't. The truth is, I told him you were taking me for coffee and not to expect me back for a while. He'll go to sleep on Dan's bed when Ira and Rita leave."

"In that case," I said, "let's go."

We walked past the Boniface cottage to my own, and I put her in the front seat of my Ford and went around and got in beside her, and we drove down the lake road to the highway and south on the highway about fifteen miles to the nearest town, which made a total distance, lake road and highway together, of about eighteen miles. She sat all the way on the far side of the seat by the door, her body slumped and her pale head against the back of the seat and her eyes staring at the roof of the car above the windshield as

if she could see through it to the stars in the sky beyond. Now and then I turned my head and looked at her, and I began slowly to see and feel the beauty of her, not lush and belting beauty like that of Rita Boniface, but a stark, high-fashion beauty that a man, once he was aware of it, might never forget. She didn't speak once in the eighteen miles.

In the all-night restaurant, which wasn't much of a restaurant in a town that wasn't much of a town, we sat across from each other in a booth and had good coffee, and finally she began to talk, or it seemed she did, but afterward I realized that she mostly listened to the talking of John Laird. I told her how I happened to be running a fishing resort, and why I liked what I did and didn't particularly want to do anything else, none of which was important to anyone but me, and it wasn't long before early dawn when we left the restaurant and started back for the lake. She was more relaxed then, and I thought there was more color in her hollow cheeks beneath high bones. She sat close to me in the seat and rested her head on my shoulder, and I liked the feel of it there, the nearness of her pale hair. On the lake road, just before we reached the cottages, she sat up and kissed me lightly and said, "Thanks for

humoring me, John Laird," and I said, "It's part of the service," and then, in a minute, we were pulling into the area beside my cottage, and Ira Boniface was standing there waiting for us in the first faint light of the day.

That was the little bit of good in all of it, the short time with Laura Quintin, and it was the end of the good when we saw Boniface. I knew it even before we got out of the Ford, before Boniface spoke.

"Where the devil have you been?" he said.

"To town for coffee," I said.

"You were gone long enough," he said.

"We took our time," I said.

"Never mind that now," he said. "Laura, you'd better go to your cottage. The one Dan had."

"I know which one," she said.

She looked at him for a moment after speaking, as if trying to decide whether to go or not, and then she shrugged and walked across the slope to the cottage and went in.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"Did you see Dan Grimes last night after we got back from eating?"

"Yes. He was drunk. Passed out in the Quintins' cottage."

"Tell me about it."

"There's nothing much to tell. He'd been sick. He went into the cottage and passed out in a chair. Laura Quintin found him

there, and I helped her lay him on the bed."

"How'd you happen to be around?"

"I'd been down to the point. On the way back I passed the cottage, and she heard me. She called me in to help."

"All right." He took a deep breath and held it and then released it slowly. "Dan's dead."

"Dead? You mean he died after we left him?"

"He was killed. Someone murdered him."

I had felt in my bones that things were going bad, but not this bad, and I stood there for a long minute staring at him and trying to make some kind of sense of what he'd said, and then, when I had, the first thing I thought afterward was what a hell of a bad break it was for my little camp that I'd worked so hard to build into a good place for good people to come fishing.

"How?" I said.

"Come on," he said. "I'll show you."

He spun around abruptly and started across the face of the slope with long strides, and I went after him. A small table lamp was burning beside the bed in the last cottage. Boniface had left it burning, I suppose, after his earlier visit. We went inside and stood beside the bed in the area of light and looked

down at the body of Dan Grimes. He was wearing, I thought at first, some kind of long, barbaric earring. Then I saw that it was not an earring at all. It was a metal stringer. The stringer was made of about a dozen large pins, much like safety pins, attached to a chain. Someone had unsnapped one of the pins and straightened it and driven it into Dan Grimes's brain through the auditory canal of his right ear. It was the stringer, I somehow knew at once, that I had left on the oak stump between this cottage and the next after I'd finished cleaning six bass the night before.

"We'd planned to go out on the lake early this morning," Ira Boniface said. "I came over to see if he still wanted to go, after last night, and this is the way I found him."

His voice was even and hard. If he was feeling any emotion at all, any anger or grief or regret or guilt, it was not discernible. I turned and brushed past him and went out onto the porch, and it was becoming then the clear bright morning of a bad day.

"I'll go phone the sheriff," I said.

The sheriff came about forty minutes after I got him out of bed. He was a very fat man. His name was Sam Austin.

"This is big, Johnny," he said.

He drew a long breath and blew it out slowly, pursing his cupid's mouth. His round blue eyes stared at me reproachfully, as if it were all somehow my fault.

"I guess I better go have a look," he said.

"He's in the last cottage," I said.

"You stick around close, Johnny. I'll want to talk to you later."

"I'll be here," I said.

He sighed again and went lumbering across the slope toward the cottage in which Dan Grimes lay dead. I could see Ira Boniface standing on the screened-in porch. He had guarded Grimes in life, and he guarded him still in death. Jerome and Laura Quintin came out of the middle cottage and stood together inside the screen. Rita Boniface walked across from the first cottage to join the Quintins. I turned and went over to the porch steps of my own cottage and sat down. I sat there for about half an hour, maybe longer, and then Sam Austin and Ira Boniface came out of the last cottage and walked over to the middle cottage, and I kept on sitting where I was. I tried to concentrate on the lake and the cool coves still deep in the shade of shoreline timber, but it was all ruined

and no good at all, and what I kept thinking about was everything that had happened since the Chrysler wagon had pulled in yesterday from Kansas City. I had a feeling that something significant had happened between then and now, something said or done that had hung for a moment on the edge of consciousness and then had slipped away. Whatever it was, I felt, would now assume in the aftermath of murder a kind of definitive and terrible meaning that had not then registered.

I didn't really want to remember it, to tell the truth, but I couldn't help trying in spite of myself, and I went over in detail everything I had seen, but it didn't help, and then I went over in detail everything I had heard, but that didn't help either. I got up from the porch steps and went down the slope to the dock. The water of the lake was still as glass and dark, dark green.

It must have been an hour later when Sam Austin came down to the dock. I could hear him descending the slope behind me, and the dock, floating on steel drums, fell and rose and fell again under the shifting of his weight as he came across it. He didn't sit down on the bench beside me. He stood at the edge of the dock and looked across the lake as if he

were wishing desperately that he were on the other side. At his feet, nosing the dock in company, side by side, were the motorboat in which he'd come and the sleek inboard that had belonged to Dan Grimes.

"Big, Johnny," he said. "This is big. And I don't like any part of it."

"Neither do I."

"Sure. I can see that. It won't do your place any good when the news gets out. These are important people, Johnny."

"I got that impression."

"Powerful people, Johnny. You heard of this Ira Boniface?"

"I understand he was Dan Grimes's right arm. Something like that."

"More than that. He's always had his own connections, his own followers. I've heard it said that he planned to get rid of Grimes and take over the organization himself in his own good time. Now's the time, I guess. With Grimes gone, he'll take over."

"You think he may have arranged the time?"

Sam looked over his shoulder, and a shudder seemed to pass through the flesh of his enormous body.

"For God's sake, keep your voice down, Johnny," he said. "You know how voices carry here."

"Sorry."

"I can't afford any mistakes, Johnny. About what you said. About Boniface arranging the time. You think so?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"The way it was done. Stabbed through the ear that way. I don't think Boniface would kill anyone like that. It's out of character."

"Maybe deliberately out of character." Sam looked at me with a glint of shrewdness in his eyes that reminded me that he was no fool, however frightened he might be. "Maybe just an opportunity that he snatched to make it look like someone else."

"Maybe. I don't think so."

"I understand you left that stringer on the stump outside the cottage after cleaning some bass last night. That right?"

"That's right."

"Anyone could have picked it up."

"Anyone."

"But only one did."

"Only one."

"The blonde woman said you helped her put Dan Grimes on the bed where he was killed. She said he'd passed out."

"Laura Quintin. Yes, I helped her."

"Afterward, she said, you and she went to town and didn't get back until nearly daylight. After Boniface had found the body."

"That's true. Boniface met us."

"Boniface says he and his wife, that blackheaded looker, went to their own cottage right after you and Mrs. Quintin left for town. He says the whisky they'd drunk had left them drawn tight and wide awake, and they couldn't sleep. He says they lay in bed and smoked and talked until it was almost time for him to get up and meet Grimes for the fishing they'd planned. He says his wife went to sleep maybe half an hour before the time, but he didn't sleep at all. I'm not the coroner, Johnny, but I'll bet my best spinner, after looking at the body, that Grimes died more than half an hour before he was found."

"I see. You mean the Bonifaces alibi each other. And Mrs. Quintin and I do the same."

"They could be lying, of course."

"The Bonifaces?"

"Yes."

"So could Laura Quintin and I."

"Not likely, Johnny. If it was her husband instead of you, I might consider it."

"The way it looks to me, you've got Jerome Quintin left."

"That's the way it looks. He says he fell on the bed in the cottage Dan Grimes had taken, the one the party was in, and

he didn't wake up until his wife came in this morning. Just his own word."

"It doesn't make sense that Jerome Quintin killed Grimes."

"No? Why not?"

"Grimes had ambitious plans for Quintin. He intended to put him in the capitol."

"Governor?"

"Eventually."

"Who told you?"

"Quintin himself. His wife corroborated it."

"It didn't have to be true, just because he said it."

"It didn't have to be, but I think it was."

"Maybe something developed that we don't know about. Maybe Grimes changed his plans. Maybe he told Quintin he was going to dump him."

"I doubt it, but maybe so. If so, how would it have helped matters to kill Grimes? Quintin would still have been in the dump."

"Not if he had an agreement with Boniface."

"I see what you mean. Quintin kills Grimes. Boniface becomes the power. Boniface assumes the support of Quintin."

"Something like that. You think it sounds reasonable?"

"No."

"I didn't think you would. Neither do I, as a matter of fact. The thing's too clumsy. If it had

been planned that way, Quintin would have to have been left in the clear."

"That's right. A man who's been a murder suspect is no candidate for office."

"You got any other ideas?"

I looked across the lake into the cool, deep pocket of a cove.

"No," I said.

He sighed and slapped a fat thigh. Turning fully around, he stared up the slope toward the cottages.

"I'm afraid to move, Johnny. That's the truth."

"You better call in the state cops."

"That's what I've been thinking."

"There's a phone in my cottage."

"Thanks. I'll use it. I've got to get the coroner out here, too."

He lumbered off the dock and up the slope. I sat on the bench and listened to him go. He breathed so heavily on the ascent that I could hear him almost the entire way to the top. And then, in a kind of flash of insight, I remembered what it was that had hung last night for a moment on the edge of consciousness, and it was nothing I had seen, and nothing I had heard, but something, instead, that I hadn't heard and should have.

The bad that had come in the

Chrysler would get no worse. It was now as bad as it could get.

The sun rose higher in the east, and shadows shortened under shoreline trees. I sat in the sun on the dock and waited for the murderer to come, and after a while she did. It seemed like a long, long while, but it wasn't. It was, from the time Sam Austin went up the slope, no more than five minutes. She sat down beside me on the bench with a soft sigh.

"You should despise us," she said. "We're corrupt people."

"Maybe I should," I said, "but I don't. Especially not you."

"You should despise me most of all."

"No. I confess that I admire you very much."

"Why?"

"Because you're beautiful. Because you were a fine companion for a little while. Because you're the coldest, cleverest woman in an emergency that I've ever known. I admire you, and I'm afraid of you."

She didn't look at me. As I remember it, she never looked at me once while she sat there. All I remember is the stark, high-fashion beauty of her cold profile as she stared steadily across the glittering water.

"Why do you say that?"

"I say it because it's so. Last night when I came up from the

point and heard you in the cottage, you made a bad mistake. When I made a noise, you were startled and spoke immediately without thinking. It was a mistake most women would have been unable to surmount. Not you. You did the only possible thing that could give you a chance to escape the consequences, and it almost worked. Instead of sending me away, which would have put you in the worst possible position after the body was found, you called me inside. You had me help you put the body on the bed, taking the head and shoulders yourself to prevent my discovering the stringer, and to prevent its making a noise in the movement. Who would dream that a murderer would ask for help to move the body of his victim? There was simply no reason why it should have occurred to me that Dan Grimes was dead, and it didn't. I accepted naturally the reasonable explanation—that he was drunk. It must require a special kind of woman to drive a piece of pointed steel into a man's brain and then, afterward, nearly caught in the act, to carry out calmly such a dangerous deception. Not only did you have a witness to the fact that Grimes was alive when you left him, but also, by keeping me with you the rest of the night, a witness

to the fact that you could not have killed him later. I feel rather bad about that. I hoped that it was only my company you wanted, but I see that it wasn't. Never mind. Providing an alibi, I guess, should be considered part of the service, too."

She lifted her head, tilting her face to the sky, as if, by doing so, she could expose herself to more of the clean bright light of the new day.

"You said you had no reason to think that he was not alive. Why do you think so now?"

"Something that almost registered at the time, but didn't quite. A little while ago, as I listened to Sam Austin climb the slope, it did. There were three of us in that dark cottage, *but only two of us were breathing*. A man in a drunken sleep breathes heavily, but during all the time we were in the room together, the three of us, I never heard Dan Grimes breathe at all."

She shrugged her thin shoulders, still looking at the sky, seeming to dismiss the indictment with indifference.

"It's really very flimsy, you know. After several hours, you remember that you didn't hear a man breathe. I doubt that it would be given much credence against my word."

"I doubt it, too. If it isn't, your

husband will certainly have to pay your consequences."

She was silent. For a full minute, she was as still as stone.

"Why?" she said.

"Because, to start with, the death of Dan Grimes must be paid for by someone. Because, to continue, Jerome Quintin is in the most vulnerable position. Because, to finish, he's now expendable. Ira Boniface, at this moment, is probably the most powerful man in this state. He doesn't have the same regard for Jerome Quintin that Dan Grimes had, and he won't have the same plans. He doesn't even like Quintin, as a matter of fact, and I've got an idea he'd be happy for a chance to dispose of him permanently. In less than a day I've learned that much, and you know it better than I do. There may be no case now, no real evidence, but it won't be too hard for Boniface to arrange it."

She stood up and walked over to the edge of the dock. I sat and looked at her thin body against the bright water and distant dark trees. After a while she spoke to me without turning.

"I was in our cottage when he came in and passed out in the chair. I started back to the other cottage, and then I saw the stringer, and I had a feeling that it had all been planned for me. I felt a kind of compulsion.

I picked up the stringer and went back and killed him. It's odd, isn't it? I killed to save my husband's soul, and now I must confess to the killing to save his life. What you said is true, and I was foolish not to see last night, when I asked you to take me away, that it would be this way. Well, it would be all right, I think, if only I could feel that it's worth it. But I don't. Now that I've done what I have, and must do what I must, I understand that Jerry's worth none of it. I should simply have left him and gone away. Will you do me a favor?"

"If I can."

"Will you please go up and ask that fat sheriff to come down? Perhaps he can take me away immediately in his boat. I don't think I could bear to face the others."

"All right," I said.

I stood and turned and started up the slope. I was about half-way up when the inboard roared to life behind me. I didn't stop or turn my head.

When we find her, I thought, tomorrow, or the day after, she will no longer look like a high-fashion model, or anyone I ever saw or knew, and it will be like looking at another person entirely.

SOLUTION TO THE DECEMBER "UNSOLVED":

Richie Adams, third base: aliens, primitive
Mike Brown, shortstop: natural, animal
Phil Clark, right field: hoax, animal
Ned Drake, pitcher: hoax, primitive
Sam Evers, first base: aliens, animal
Tony Fulton, catcher: aliens, hoax
Ken Grange, second base: natural, primitive
Les Harris, left field: natural, hoax
Oscar Iles, center field: hoax, hoax

Paquette's Birthday

by Herb Henson

“**T**here were no problems in Antipuluan until the American came here,” Jess said. As he talked, his strong fisherman’s fingers moved deftly, alternately weaving, then tying, two lengths of monofilament fishing line into small squares.

“The American bothers no one as far as I can see,” Meding replied. The old woman was stripping fiber threads from the husk of a dried coconut. Later, she would braid and splice these threads into a single strong line for use as the outer edge of the fishing net. The two were sitting on the porch of Meding’s house.

“Anyway, we don’t know that Tassig is dead,” Meding said.

Jess shook his head. “A man goes fishing as he has every day since he was a boy in waters he has fished many years. He doesn’t return to the village and his wife and children for three days and nights. Yes, I think he must be dead.”

They continued working for a few minutes without talking. Gusts of wind rustled the thatch roof of the house. As he worked, Jess watched the horizon to the east where black clouds had gathered, filling the sky. The bay and the Sulu Sea beyond the reef stirred restlessly, whitecaps forming in the freshening breeze. Outrigger fishing boats, nosed up to the nearby beach and tethered to coconut trees, rose and fell in the waves.

“Other unexplained things have happened, too,” Jess said. “Rosemary, the daughter of George, also mysteriously missing; pigs, dogs, and chickens gone without a trace. Things like these did not happen before the American came here.”

Meding studied the tone of his voice—something more than just concern, she thought. Resentment? What the young man said was true, but she could not see what part the American could have had in these things that were disturbing the tranquility of their village. As the oldest and most respected of Antipuluan’s elders, she was expected to know what to do to restore things to normal. She knew that Jess, the unofficial leader of the men, had come to her for her opinion and advice. But she wasn’t ready to give it yet.

"I will think about what you have said," she told him, delaying any decision.

Jess nodded. His business finished, it was time for him to go. He got up and carefully laid the net aside. "I must see to my boat now," he said.

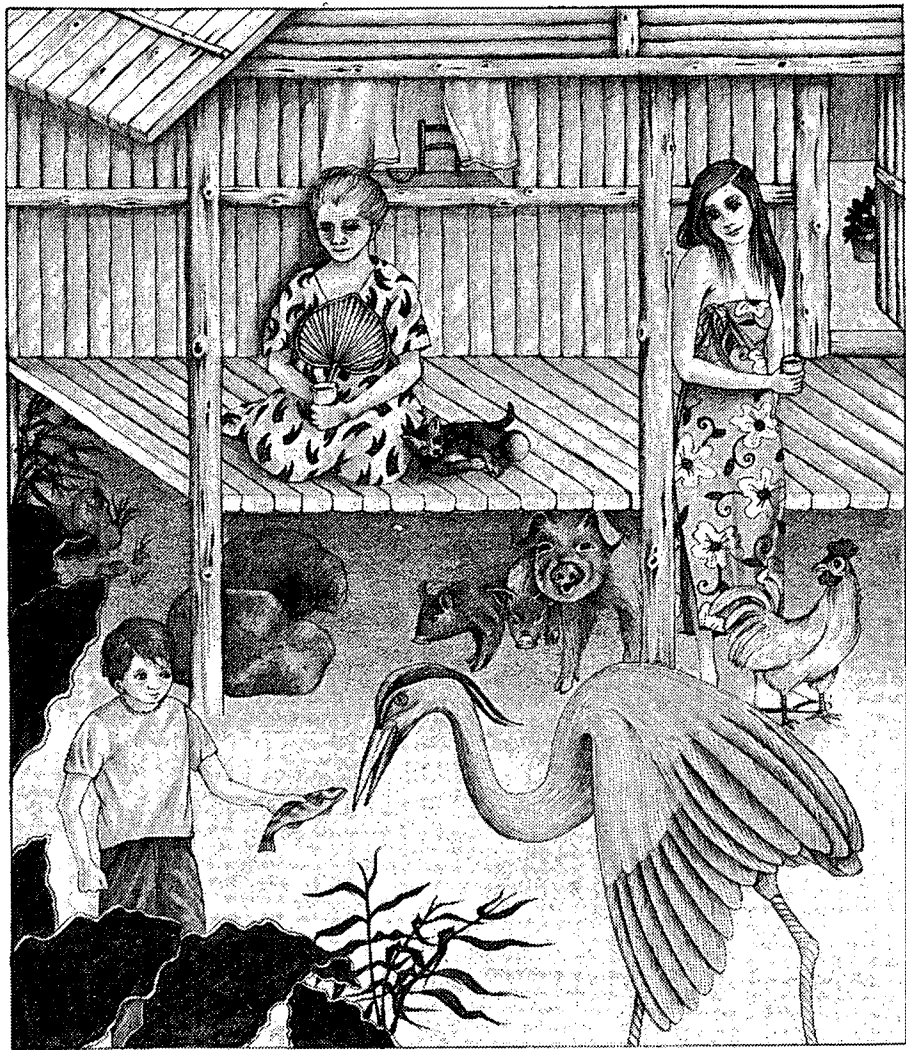
He left the porch and walked quickly through the grove of coconut trees to the beach, his long black hair blowing in the wind. Other fishermen were already there. Bare to the waist, muscles rippling under sun-darkened skin, they worked together heaving their boats out of the water and up on the beach, safe from the approaching storm.

Meding folded and stowed the net under the porch. Inside the house, she closed and latched woven bamboo shutters over the windows. She was just in time. The rain began, only a few drops at first, then a drenching downpour. Snug inside, she stoked the cooking fire, palmed a handful of rice into a pan of water, then balanced the blackened pan on the rocks over the fire. She worked mechanically, her mind busy sorting and defining questions to be answered. Is the American somehow causing our troubles? Is it just coincidence that these things happened after he came to the village? What is the connection?

It had grown cold. She wrapped an old sweater around her shoulders and sat crosslegged on the floor by the fire. Underneath the house, sheltered from the rain, her animals complained noisily about their close quarters. She watched the water in the pan as it started to boil and thought back to when the American had arrived in Antipuluan two weeks earlier. The American's wife, Paquette, had been born and raised here. Hers was a local success story. After finishing high school in Puerto Princesa, the island's capital city, Paquette had gone to the United States to live with an American family and to go to college on a scholarship. Then and now this was a rare opportunity for a young Filipina from a poor family. Everyone in the village had been excited about Paquette's adventure and good fortune. That was ten years ago. Now the young woman was back home to visit and had brought along her American husband and their young son. The three were staying with Paquette's sister, a half-kilometer up the beach from Meding's house.

The rice was ready. Meding spooned a helping into a bowl and mixed in wild greens and pieces of dried fish.

Seated again by the fire, she ate her meal and resumed her analysis.



NICK-NICK HAD MADE HER PROUD, PUTTING ON A PERFORMANCE THAT
HAD THEM ALL LAUGHING.

The day after she and her family had arrived in Antipuluan, Paquette had come to Meding's house to pay her respects. She came alone just after the morning meal and brought pandisal bread and mangoes in a basket. Like Meding, she wore the tapis dress favored by the island women, wrapped around her figure, tucked and secured above her breasts. Meding had been busy building small fires in her yard, making smoke to drive off the mosquitoes that always came during the night. After the two had embraced, Meding held Paquette at arm's length.

"You have improved in size," she said, smiling.

Paquette laughed, flashing perfect white teeth. "You mean I have become fat?"

"No, no. You are the same pretty girl I remember, only now you have filled out and become a beautiful woman."

It was true. But if Paquette had stayed here in the village, Meding thought, she would now be gap-toothed and worn like her less fortunate schoolmates.

While Meding heated water for coffee, Paquette explained that she and her family had returned to Antipuluan so that they could celebrate her birthday in the place where she was born.

"When is your birthday?" Meding asked.

"Two days from today."

"There will be a party?"

"Yes, in the evening when it is cool," Paquette explained. "And during the day we will be taking a trip to satisfy a curiosity I have had since I was a little girl."

Paquette pointed toward the sea to a tiny hump visible on the horizon.

"Since I was a child collecting shells along this beach, I have wanted to visit that island," she said. "In my mind then it was a very beautiful place. Now, finally, I shall go there and see for myself. My brother-in-law, Roberto, will take us in his boat."

"The place is called Arena Island," Meding said. "No one lives there, only sea birds."

"You have been to the island?"

"Only once. I brought something back. Come, let me show you."

They put their coffee cups aside and Meding led the way around to the back of her house. A bamboo cage sat under the overhang of the house, supported above the ground on several flat rocks.

"Nick nick," Meding said.

At the sound of her voice, a gray-plumed head on a long, feath-

ered neck popped up between the bamboo bars of the cage.

"Nick nick," the bird responded.

Paquette laughed with delight.

"He is my pet," Meding said, loosing the catch at the top of the cage. The bird nuzzled her fingers. "His name is Nick-Nick and he is a sea heron. I took Nick-Nick's egg from his mother's nest in the sand on Arena Island two years ago."

"He is wonderful," Paquette said.

Meding lifted the heron from the cage and set him on the ground at her feet. The bird sprang away and bounded about the yard, his head bobbing up and down.

"Nick nick, nick nick," the bird chortled as he ran. Meding's sow squealed with annoyance as Nick-Nick sprinted past her bed of mud.

"You must bring your husband and son to see him," Meding told Paquette. "Come at feeding time. He eats only fish, so his mealtime is just before siesta when the men return from fishing."

"I will bring them," Paquette promised.

Meding finished eating and rinsed her bowl. Outside, the wind and rain rattled and pelted her house furiously. This is a storm, she thought, not merely a squall. She wondered how long it would last. If the bad weather continued through the night, the men would miss a day's fishing—another problem added to the others. The villagers needed to fish for their food and also to earn the few pesos they received selling part of their catch to the merchants from the nearby town of Narra. Lying down on the floor by the fire, she pulled her sleeping blanket over her, closed her eyes, and resumed examining what she knew about the American.

The day after the first meeting, as promised, Paquette had brought her husband and son to visit. The American was tall and lean. He had short brown hair peppered with gray, and brown eyes that were both intelligent and friendly. The boy was small for a six-year-old, but he was a handsome mixture of his father and mother's features and skin coloring and seemed bright and happy. Both father and son were dressed in T-shirts, faded jeans, and dusty sneakers. After the introductions were over, the adults sat on the porch sipping coconut wine while the boy inspected the yard and Meding's animals.

"You must find our ways here very simple compared to your life in the United States," Meding had said to the American. Her English was good, remembered from her schooling and practiced at every opportunity.

"Different," the American replied. "But your way of life here isn't so simple. It requires skills few Americans have to live from the land and sea as people here do." He spoke softly and, Meding thought, with confidence and authority. A man accustomed to being listened to.

"What work do you do?" she asked.

"I retired from the army just a month ago," the American replied. "I was a soldier for twenty years."

"We met while I was going to school," Paquette explained. "My husband was teaching an army reserve training course at the college where I was a student."

Meding nodded. "So what will you do now?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," the American shrugged. "I don't know the answer to that question yet."

At this point, Paquette had changed the subject, asking Meding what had become of several of her classmates. Later they went around to the back of the house and Meding took Nick-Nick from his cage for feeding. The bird had made her proud, putting on a performance that had them all laughing. He ran around the yard bobbing his head and chortling, then dashing to them to snatch the pieces of fish they held out for him. When the heron's stomach was full, he allowed the boy to hold him and stroke his feathers. The visit ended with Paquette asking Meding to attend her birthday party the following evening. Meding accepted.

Paquette's birthday party had been memorable. All the villagers were there as well as many of Paquette's relatives and former classmates who had traveled to the event from other villages and towns on the island. Roberto had killed a pig and several chickens for the occasion and roasted them on a spit over a huge fire built in the yard. To go with the meat, the women had prepared rice, adobo, and lumpia. For dessert there were sweet rolls, mango slices, and roasted bananas. After the meal, the men gathered by the fire, smoking cigarettes and drinking San Miguel beer bought by the American. The young children, including Paquette's son, played tag among the trees, staying close to the light. Teenage girls danced with each other to American rock music from a transistor radio

tuned to the station in Puerto Princesa. The girls giggled and pointed, trying to coax the boys their age to dance with them. The boys acted aloof, feigning uninterest to hide their shyness. The married women gathered on the porch to gossip.

"How was your trip to Arena Island today?" Meding asked Paquette.

"It was fun," Paquette said. "We had a picnic; then my husband and I walked around the island on the beach. It was every bit as beautiful a place as I had imagined." She leaned over and whispered in Meding's ear: "We went skinny dipping."

Meding laughed. "Then you had the island all to yourselves?"

"Yes. My husband and I liked Arena so much that we may be interested in buying the land and living there."

"I don't think there is an owner," Meding said. "When I was on the island two years ago, there were no coconut trees. For someone to become the owner of the land, before petitioning the government, they must plant coconut trees and build a house."

Paquette nodded. "You are probably right," she said. "We didn't see any coconut trees there today, and there was no house, at least not along the beach."

In the yard, the teenage girls had succeeded in persuading two of the boys to dance. But the young men were embarrassed and shuffled to the music only half-heartedly.

"Let me show you how it's done," Tassig had said. He put down his San Miguel bottle and grabbed one of the girls by the hand. In the packed dirt by the fire, the two stepped and swayed skillfully to the beat of the music. Rosemary whirled and laughed, long hair streaming, while Tassig swung her around, then stepped aside to let her go it alone, clapping his hands in time with the music. Sweat glistened on his bare torso.

On the porch with the women, Tassig's wife snorted. "If he had as much energy for work as he does for dancing with the young women, we would not be so poor," she said. The women laughed.

"Now you try it," Tassig told the boys. He returned to the gathering of men by the fire, and the teenagers paired off again, waiting for the next song to start.

Meding remembered that this had been the last time she had seen either Rosemary or Tassig. Two days after the party the young woman had disappeared—run away from home, her parents thought and hoped. The girl had been restless, not content to help her mother around the house. George did not have the money to

send her to school in Puerto Princesa. And then, not long after, Tassig had gone fishing as usual and not returned. No sign of either him or his boat had been found.

As the evening went on and more beer was consumed, the men's conversation became more animated. From her place on the porch with the women, Meding couldn't tell what the men were talking about, but she noticed that the American was active in the discussion, speaking mostly in English and at times in rudimentary Tagalog. She would have to find out what the men had talked about. Perhaps there would be a clue.

It took all night for the tropical storm to sweep across the island. By first light the rain was over and the violent wind was replaced by a light and pleasant breeze. To the east the sky was clear; to the west the backside of the storm was moving away from the village across the jagged mountain peaks in the island's interior. Meding stepped out on the porch to survey the damage caused by the storm. Her chickens were in the yard foraging busily for food. She saw that the damage was slight: a few fronds on the house roof were awry; a small coconut palm had been blown over; the yard was strewn with tree branches; and brown and green coconuts of assorted sizes were on the ground everywhere.

"Good morning." Jess waved to her from the muddy road behind the house, then started down the path, picking his way through the fallen tree branches. He pointed to the misplaced fronds on the roof of the house. "I will fix," he said. "I have the time—there will be no fishing until late tonight."

While Jess worked on the roof, Meding fed her animals, then cooked rice and made coffee. From a young vendor who made regular morning rounds of Antipuluan on a bicycle, she bought pandisal to go with their breakfast. When the food was ready, she laid it out on the battered porch table and the two sat down to eat.

"At Paquette's birthday party," Meding said, "what did the men talk about?"

Jess shrugged. "The usual things: our families, our boats, fishing and farming—that sort of thing."

Meding persisted. "Later in the evening your talk was of other matters?"

"Yes," Jess replied hesitantly. "Roberto happened to mention that the leader of the bandits had come to see him and told him that there will now be a weekly tax on everyone in the village. The

bandit said that Roberto would collect this tax. There was much discussion about this; of whether or not we should pay this increased tax."

This was a development Meding was not aware of. The bandits Jess spoke of were the militant part of the longstanding Moro or Moslem uprising on their southern Philippine island. The improbable goal of this group was to take control of the island and secede from the rest of the Philippines, thus establishing a Moslem nation independent of the Manila government; this in spite of the fact that the majority of the island's people were devout Catholics. Outlawed but tolerated by the government, several bands of pseudo-guerrillas subsisted in the mountains, coming down into the villages occasionally for food and to try to recruit supporters for their cause. When they came into the villages, they carried military rifles and wore bandoliers of ammunition draped across their chests. Because the men were armed and possibly dangerous, the villagers in Antipuluan and elsewhere put up with them, listened to their political speeches, and paid the nominal taxes the bandits demanded. The people considered the taxes a voluntary donation because sometimes they couldn't pay and the bandits, so far at least, had done nothing in reprisal. Antipuluan's elders, Meding included, had long ago decided that it was in their best interest to cooperate and meet the minimal demands of the bandit group.

"Why wasn't I told of this?" Meding demanded.

"I was going to tell you today," Jess replied sheepishly.

"Pah," Meding spat out. Was she getting too old for her opinion to be respected?

"And what did the American have to say about this," she asked, controlling her anger with an effort.

"He had much to say," Jess replied. Meding saw the sudden fire come into his eyes. Resentment again?

"The American said that he had been an army advisor during the early years of his country's fight with the Vietcong guerrillas in South Vietnam." He pointed to the west; Vietnam lay just across the narrow South China Sea from their island. "He told us that in the beginning, the Vietcong behaved much the same as our bandits. But later they demanded that their taxes be paid and took the young men from the villages against their will to become Vietcong soldiers. He said that we must be careful to not let such a thing happen here."

"This sounds like good advice," Meding said.

"But what does he know?" Jess said. "He is an outsider here."

"Right now he is," Meding said. "But the American is considering living here with his family, so it could be said that he does have an interest."

"I know that he is considering this," Jess replied. His tone and smoldering eyes said to Meding that he wasn't happy about the prospect.

"You and Paquette were schoolmates?" Meding asked, changing the subject abruptly.

Jess nodded.

"Did you like her then?"

"Of course I liked her; she was very popular."

"I mean did you like her in a special way?"

Jess's eyes flashed anger for a moment, then cooled.

"Yes," he said. "In fact, I wanted her to be my wife after she finished school in Puerto Princesa, but—"

"But instead," Meding added softly, "Paquette went to the United States and now is back here with an American husband."

Jess nodded. "But this has nothing to do with what I suspect about the American," he added quickly.

"What is it that you suspect?"

"The night of Paquette's party," Jess explained, "it was Tassig who argued that we should do whatever the bandits want. The American said—"

Their conversation was interrupted by a young girl running through the coconut grove to the house.

"Madame Meding," the girl shouted, "come quick. My brother is very sick and my mother told me to get you."

The afternoon sun was sinking behind the mountain peaks by the time Meding trudged wearily down the path to her house. She was tired, but it had been a good day—she was satisfied with her work. The sick child was the son of the neighbor of Paquette's sister. He had been running a fever and had gone into convulsions that morning. Cool water baths had broken the child's fever, and Meding was sure that her herbal medicines and prayers would cure the little boy of his ailment within a few days.

The first unusual thing she noticed as she approached the house was that her chickens were roosting in the lower branches of the trees and bushes. This was not out of the ordinary after dark—the

birds sought the safety of the branches while they slept—but it was still early, the sun not yet down. On the porch she found her two ducks huddled beneath the table. The cat wasn't in his usual napping spot on the porch rail. Her baby chicks were gathered in a tight group under the house. She counted six chicks—two were missing and the mother hen was nowhere in sight. Perplexed, Meding hurried around the house to the back. To her dismay she saw that the sea heron's cage had been knocked off its rock foundation. The cage door was ajar and Nick-Nick was gone. For the next fifteen minutes she took inventory of her animals and searched the surrounding jungle for signs of the missing chickens and Nick-Nick. Nothing. When she had given up her search, the cat bounded out of the jungle, ran to her, and rubbed his body back and forth on her legs, purring softly. She patted his side. I wish you could tell me, she thought.

Meding was still visibly upset, walking around the yard studying the ground, when Paquette came down the path from the road carrying a basket full of soft drinks she had purchased at Antipuluan's tiny convenience or "Sari-Sari" store.

"What is the matter, Madame Meding?" She set her basket on the porch steps and took Meding's hands, searching her eyes. Meding told her what had happened.

"There is no sign of who or what did this thing?" Paquette asked. Meding shook her head.

"I have looked, but in the brush and mud it is difficult to tell the marks of my animals from any other, or one person's footprints from another's. In fact, in some parts of the yard it looks as if someone tried to brush away any marks or footprints, perhaps with a tree branch."

"I'm sorry this has happened to you," Paquette said, "especially losing Nick-Nick."

Meding nodded. "This kind of thing has been happening to others in the village lately. I should not be surprised that it has happened to me."

The two women sat on the porch steps. Paquette opened two bottles of orange soda and handed one of them to Meding. The cat jumped into Meding's lap and resumed his purring. She stroked his fur absently.

"How is the son of my neighbor doing?" Paquette asked. "I know that you spent most of today looking after him. That's why you weren't home and—"

"The boy should be well soon," Meding said, not waiting for Paquette to finish her sentence. "I will check on his condition tomorrow and make more medicine for his treatment. And you, Paquette? Have you and your husband decided to stay in Antipuluan, or will you be returning to the United States soon?"

"It's almost time for us to go home," Paquette replied, "if we are going to. We're undecided. My husband is concerned for our safety here because of the bandits. He wishes he could convince the other men of the threat to everyone that these people represent."

"Decisions that affect everyone in Antipuluan are not necessarily made only by the men," Meding said. "Perhaps he should come here and also talk to me about it."

"I will tell him," Paquette said. "I must be going now before it's dark. Would you like to eat with us tonight?"

Meding shook her head. "I am going now to see Jess. I will fish with him tonight if he agrees to take me along, then go to Arena Island to look for another sea heron egg. Nick-Nick, I am afraid, will not be found."

When Paquette had gone, Meding gathered her orphaned chicks and put them in a covered basket along with a handful of seeds. She put the basket inside the house for the night. They will be safe, she thought, from whatever or whoever is doing these things to us.

Well after midnight, Meding held the tiller while Jess waded and pushed his boat away from the beach. When he was up to his chest in the water, he scrambled aboard and started the old pump engine while Meding lit the boat's running light, a candle waxed to the bottom of an old wine bottle. The other fishermen from the village were already gone, their running lights barely visible miles away beyond the reef. The night was warm, wet, and black like the ocean water; the only sounds the quiet lap of the sea on the reef and the chug-chug of their engine. Jess sat on top of the engine hatch, bamboo tiller in hand, and steered the boat carefully through the gap in the reef, then pointed the bow toward Arena Island. They couldn't see the island, but knew that from their village it lay directly beneath the three stars of the constellation Orion.

The boat was slow, so it was much later when they saw the black profile of Arena looming ahead. Jess killed the engine and dropped the anchor, careful not to make a splash. He then lowered a sounding line and pulled it back up, measuring the depth of the water

beneath the boat. Satisfied with their location, he made himself comfortable on the engine hatch. They would wait, then put out the net about an hour before dawn. The fish would be feeding then.

Meding poured two cups of coffee from her thermos and handed one of them to Jess.

"This morning, when the child came to get me, you were about to tell me of suspicions you have about the American," she said.

"Yes," Jess replied. "At the party, Tassig told the men that whatever the bandits want we should give to them so they do not make trouble for us. The other men were unsure of what we should do. The American said that what Tassig suggested would be the wrong thing to do; that the more we give to the bandits, the more they will take, and the worse it will become for us. He suggested that instead we should all of us, as a group, make a stand and tell them that their cause is not our cause; that we will not make trouble for them but neither will we give them our food or pay them a tax."

Meding said nothing. Jess sipped his coffee, then continued. "It was about two days after this discussion at Paquette's party that the unexplained things started happening in Antipuluan. I suspect that he wants us to believe it is the bandits who are responsible so that we will become angry and do as he advised us to do. The American is a professional soldier and knows of using such tactics to make things happen. Also, he would not have to actually do anything himself. He has money and there are many in this province who will steal animals and make people disappear if they are paid enough pesos to do it."

"I don't understand why you believe the American would do this," Meding said.

"The American has said that he wants to live here with Paquette and his son. I think he is concerned about what will happen here in the future. He knows that he is not one of us and fears that he may have to face the bandits alone."

"That would be a reasonable fear," Meding said, "but I don't think the American is so easily frightened and I think you may have misjudged his character. Have you considered that perhaps it is the bandits who are doing these things; that they want us to suspect the American and make him leave Antipuluan so that they will feel free to come and go in the village as they always have before? Perhaps they are nearby but are afraid to come into the village while the American is here."

"It is another possibility," Jess admitted. He finished his coffee

and rinsed the cup. "We must get ready to fish now," he said.

The sky was growing light in the east as Jess pulled up the anchor. With an oar, he sculled the boat along, parallel with the island's shoreline, while dropping sections of his fishing net over the side. Floats began to trail out in the water behind them. In a few minutes the net was out. Again he dropped the anchor and sat down to wait, this time without conversation.

As they waited and watched, the approaching sun slowly pushed back the ceiling of stars. To the west, the mountains of the big island turned from black to gray to green as the sun lifted above the horizon. Close by, Arena Island emerged from the gray to become an emerald gem circled by a band of white sand. Jess stirred from his makeshift bunk on the engine hatch and motioned to Meding. It was time to bring in the net. With one arm, Jess paddled the boat along the line of floats; with the other arm, he reached down and dragged the net over the gunwale a section at a time. Fish caught in the mesh squirmed, their silver sides flashing in the bright morning sunlight. Soon their catch lay between them on the bottom of the boat. While Jess sorted the fish and put them on stringers, Meding folded and stowed the net in the bow. When the work was finished, Jess started the engine and they headed for Arena. Meding sat in the bow to watch for submerged reefs. They both laughed as a sea snake poked its head above the water, saw the boat, and quickly ducked back beneath the placid green surface of the sea.

They made their landfall in a pristine cove between two points of rock and sand. Meding waded ashore, waved to Jess, and started off down the beach.

When she got back to the boat, the sun was high overhead. She had been ashore on Arena much longer than she had intended. She had found a sea heron nest, and the egg she sought was safely wrapped in a cloth she carried in her hand. She had also found something else—something more important; something she had to keep to herself, at least for the present. Jess was annoyed with her.

"By the time we get back to the village, the fish buyers will have left for Narra," he grumbled. As Meding climbed aboard, he pushed the boat out into the water, jumped aboard, and started the engine.

"I'm sorry," Meding said, but she offered no explanation. To make up time, Jess ran the old engine harder than he normally would; the bow and the outriggers sliced through the water as they closed the distance to the big island at a ten-knot clip.

Gliding over the shallows they saw that most of the other fishing boats from the village were pulled up on the sand. They exchanged waves with fishermen patching their nets on the beach and with pre-school children playing in the shade of the coconut palm and mangrove trees that bordered the beach. Near a cluster of nippa huts, they saw a group of men and women gathered around several brightly colored motor tricycles.

"Good," Jess said, "at least some of the fish buyers are still here." He cut the engine and they drifted forward until the bottom of the boat crunched in the sand. Meding waded ashore and secured the bow line to a tree trunk while Jess, stringers of fish over his arm, sloshed out of the water and headed for the group of people by the motor tricycles.

Later, the business of selling fish completed, Jess and Meding walked up the beach in the direction of Meding's house. Jess had saved several choice fish and carried them dangling from his hand on a stringer. Meding carried the sea heron egg in its protective cloth. She had insisted on preparing fish and rice for their noon meal.

Shouts: "Madame Meding, Jess!"

They turned to see Paquette, the American, and their son on the beach behind them. Laughing, the three ran to catch up, racing each other in the loose sand. Paquette and the boy, running hard, arrived first. The American was right behind them, jogging easily.

"We were on our way to your house to see you, Madame Meding," Paquette said, breathing hard and struggling to catch her breath. She laughed. "When I was a girl I used to run the length of this beach and never even breathe hard."

"If you lived here again for long, you would get your wind back," Meding said. "I'm glad you have come. You can join us for fish and rice. Also, I have a new pet." She unfolded the cloth and showed them the sea heron egg. "You can watch while I persuade one of my hens to adopt it."

"That should be fun," Paquette said.

The group continued walking up the beach a short distance, then turned to walk through the coconut grove to Meding's house. They had no sooner reached the shade of the trees when they heard the ruckus: chickens were squawking and Meding's sow was squealing. Alarmed, Meding dashed ahead, Jess close behind her. What she saw when she reached the yard made her pull up sharply.

In the middle of the yard was the biggest komodo dragon she had seen in all of her life. It was about ten feet long; thick, squat, and

leathery. The big reptile was devouring a chicken, mashing the bird in its massive jaws. Other chickens were frantically fluttering their way to the safety of the tree branches while Meding's sow strained at her rope, eyes rolling in terror. The cat was on the porch rails, his back arched and fur bristling. Jess hesitated only a moment, then dropped the stringer of fish and ran past Meding, waving his arms and shouting. The American was there too, casting looks around the yard for something to use as a weapon. The dragon saw them.

Startled, it paused, then dropped the mangled chicken, whirled, and, stubby legs churning in the dirt, slithered away from them toward the edge of the jungle on the far side of the yard. What followed all happened in a matter of seconds. The dragon had chosen its escape route unwisely and found itself trapped between the pursuers and an impassable stand of bamboo. It turned and lunged for Jess. Jess pulled up fast—too fast. He slipped in the mud and went down on his back. Instantly he cocked both legs to ward off the attack. The dragon never reached him. The American was there, grabbing the thrashing tail with both hands and arms. Its tail and back lifted off the ground, the dragon twisted its head around and snapped at the American. Grunting with his effort, the American spun and slung the huge reptile into the bushes by Meding's garden. Clear of obstructions, the komodo dragon didn't look back. It barrelled away into the jungle and was gone.

Hearts pounding, they were all transfixed for several moments. The American was the first to move. He helped a speechless and shaken Jess to his feet. Paquette and the boy ran to the American's side.

"Well, now we know," Meding said. Then she laughed. "I think that the lizard was more frightened than we were. He will not stop running for miles and I do not think he will ever do his raiding in Antipuluan again. His brain is small, but he has a very good memory."

"This net should be finished soon," Jess said. He held up the nearly completed corner he was working on. "This is all I have left to do."

Meding was working her way around the outside edge of the net, tying the fiber rope to the mesh every few inches with short lengths of monofilament line.

"And just in time," she replied. "Tassig has agreed to buy this

net from me to replace the one he lost in his accident."

The two were seated crosslegged in the shade on Meding's porch, the net draped between them. It was midday and hot. They were both tired; their morning had been a busy one. Early that morning, Jess had walked to Narra and arranged to rent a jeepney to take Paquette, her husband, and their son to Puerto Princesa. While he was doing this, Meding had helped the family with packing their things, and had gathered fruit for them to eat during the long trip back to the city. Later a large group of villagers had gathered by the road for the goodbyes. Paquette had promised that she and her family would try to return next year for her birthday. She was crying, but her husband and son, Meding thought, appeared to be glad to be on their way home. Soon they were gone, the jeepney speeding away up the dusty road. Their visit had been something new and interesting for everyone in the village. A little sad, they returned to their chores, to the routine of their existence.

Jess shook his head and laughed. "I am having a hard time believing Tassig's story about his accident. It is difficult to believe that a man who knows boats could have his engine quit on him, then drift all the way to the southern tip of the island before he could get the boat ashore, find parts, and make repairs. I would not be surprised if there is more to the story than he told us when he showed up on the beach last night."

"You are right. There *is* more to the story," Meding said, "and I will tell you the rest now, but you must promise to tell no one else."

Jess nodded his agreement, and Meding continued.

"Rosemary will also be home soon. Her story to her parents will be that she ran away and was staying with friends in Narra. But she found that she missed her family and decided to come home. The truth is that Rosemary and Tassig have been together on Arena Island all this time."

Jess's mouth dropped open in surprise. "I begin to understand now," he said.

"While I was ashore on Arena yesterday looking for a sea heron egg, I saw a small house built back in the jungle a short distance from the beach. When Paquette was on the island the day of her birthday, she walked all the way around the island and did not see a house. So I looked some more and soon found Tassig's boat pulled up in the bushes where it could not be seen from the water. After that, it didn't take me long to find Tassig and Rosemary. There is

much difference in their ages and things had not worked between them as well as they had expected. Both of them wanted to go back to Antipuluan and their families, but did not know how to do it."

"And so you helped them with their stories," Jess said.

Meding nodded. "Of course there may be a problem later—Rosemary could be pregnant. If that should be the case—well, we will worry about that if it happens. I have counseled with families and worked out such troubles before."

"So now all of the unusual things that have happened here recently are explained," Jess said. "And, as you thought, the American had nothing to do with any of them."

They worked in silence for a few minutes.

"It was best that Paquette and her family went home instead of trying to live here," Meding said. "Life here is hard and much different from what they are accustomed to in the United States. That is true even for Paquette; she has been gone from here for a long time. And the American, even though his intentions were good, he was wrong and could have brought us serious trouble with the bandits."

Jess raised his eyebrows in question.

"The American is used to dealing with problems from a position of power," Meding explained. "He is used to having money and, if needed, guns. Here, we are not in that position. The government cannot help us against the bandits, and neither will they give us the weapons we must have if we are to stand up against them ourselves. As it is now, one bandit with a gun could kill everyone in the village. The bandits and their foolish cause have been with us for many years, and during that time their numbers haven't grown. It is best that we continue to throw them our scraps to make them satisfied, and keep on living in peace. This is something the American would not understand."

"But he is a good man," Jess said. "Paquette did well." He paused, then added: "And you are a wise woman, Madame Meding."

She smiled but said nothing. Experience and the wisdom that comes from it are the things your elders are good for, young man, she thought. I hope you remember this the next time there are problems in the village.

Call to Witness

by Nancy Schachterle

The police captain himself came to see Allison. That pleased her immensely; but it's only right, she thought. The Ryder name still means something in this town, even if the last survivor is an old maid of eighty-three. Secretly she had been afraid that she had been in the backwater of age for so long that most people, if they thought about her at all, had decided that she must be long since dead.

Everett Barkley, he told her his name was. He was tall and well-built, filling his uniform to advantage, with little sign of the paunch that so many men his age allowed to develop.

Barkley helped himself to her father's big leather chair, slumping comfortably to accommodate his frame to its rump-sprung curves. Allison started toward a straight-backed chair suited to the erect posture of her generation, then yielded to the pleading of well-aged bones and lowered herself carefully into her familiar upholstered armchair.

The policeman surveyed the piecrust table at his elbow, laden with silver-framed photo-

graphs. Gingerly he reached out and picked up Dodie's picture.

"Mrs. Patrick. She must have been very young when this was taken."

"Nineteen. She sat for that four years ago." And she had watched, not an hour ago, Allison recalled, as they carried Dodie to the ambulance with a blanket entirely covering her.

"Did you know her well? As you probably know, I've been in town less than a year and I had never seen her before the ... before this morning."

Allison shuddered slightly. Automatically her hand went to her lap to caress Snowball, to seek comfort in the warm, silky fur, and the pulsations of the gentle, almost silent, purr. With a start she remembered that she had let him out in the early hours of the morning, and he hadn't yet returned. Worry nagged at her.

What had Captain Barkley asked? Yes—about Dodie. *Did I know her well?*

"She came toddling up my front steps one day when she was about two, and we've been fast friends ever since. At that

time she lived just up the hill, in the next block."

"And since they were married they've lived next door to you?"

"That's right."

"Miss Ryder . . ." The policeman shifted his position, slightly ill at ease. "Would you tell me something about Dodie? Anything you like. Just your mental picture of her."

Allison reached to take the photograph from him. "This shows her spirit well, those laughing, sparkling eyes. She was a happy girl. She used to come running up those steps—she never walked, always running—and she looked so full of life. Vital is the word that comes to my mind. Dancing, tennis, swimming, golf, singing—that was Dodie."

Allison looked down at the gray old hands that held the picture, with their knotted veins and their liver spots. Dodie had been the youth she herself had lost.

"I can see her right now, sitting on the porch railing, swinging those long, tanned legs. 'Frank finally asked me to the dance, Miss Ryder,' she told me. She was leaning so far out to look down the street that I was afraid she'd fall into my sweet william. 'Here he comes now. 'Bye. See you.' And she

was gone, laughing and waving to him."

She had been pleased about Dodie and Frank, Allison remembered. All she knew of Frank Patrick was a dark, goodlooking boy with a quick grin and a cheery wave. She didn't know then that he was one of those helpless, hopeless creatures who feed on hurt. His charm swept up people like lilted dance music. Then, when they were dizzy from his gift of pleasure with themselves, he launched his barb and sucked at the wound. As his victims shriveled, Frank swelled with a grotesque satisfaction. Given the choice between kind and cruel, legal and illegal, moral and immoral, he'd rather go the lower path each time.

Allison handed the picture back to Captain Barkley. Carefully he placed it back among the dozen or so others that crowded the little table.

"Nieces and nephews, and their children," Allison remarked. "I even have one great-great," she told him, with visible pride. "But Dodie was closer to me than any of them."

The policeman shifted his cap between his fingers in a broken, shuffling motion as if he were saying the rosary on it.

"Miss Ryder," he said, lifting his eyes to meet hers, "it'll be out soon, so I might as well tell

you, the doctor is virtually certain it was an overdose, probably of her sleeping pills. We'll know for sure after the autopsy. What I'm trying to do now is get a picture of her, of her husband, of her life. Now, the Patrick house and yours are very close, can't be much more than fifteen or twenty feet apart, and their bedroom is on this side. I noticed the window was open about eight inches at the bottom. Knowing how easily sound travels on these warm, summer nights, I wondered..." He paused, waiting for Allison to volunteer the ending to his sentence. She was wearing a look of polite attention, but said nothing.

"Well," he continued, "I just wondered whether you might have heard anything."

Absently Allison's hand reached again for Snowball's head. Where could he be? She had heard him yowling his love songs on the back fence about three this morning, so she knew he was near home. Then she shook herself mentally, and tried to remember what the officer had been saying. Oh, yes. *Did I hear anything?*

"My bedroom is on the far side of the house from the Patricks'. I'm afraid I can be of no help to you, Captain... Barkley, isn't it?"

Allison shrank into herself a

little, half expecting a bolt of chastening lightning from above. But she hadn't lied, she decided. Her bedroom was indeed on the far side. She needn't tell him that most nights she didn't sleep well, and it was cooler out on the screened porch, practically outside Dodie's open window.

Barkley nodded, musing. "I understand Mrs. Patrick was a complete invalid for the past couple of years. Can you tell me anything about that?"

Allison sat a little more upright, legs crossed at the ankles and hands quiet in her lap. Absurdly, a seventy-year-old picture flashed into her memory of the class at Miss Van Rensselaer's Academy for Young Ladies absorbing the principles of being prim and proper. What did any of it matter now, she wondered, after all these years? It was people, and what they did to each other, that mattered. Dodie, too, had gone to a private school, and see what happened to her.

"She went out driving by herself one night," she told Barkley, "and... had an accident. Her spinal cord was crushed, and she was paralyzed from the waist down."

Allison remembered that night much too clearly. The stifling heat had been emphasized by the heartless cheerfulness of

crickets. About eleven o'clock, Allison had prepared a glass of lemonade for herself, and moved to the old wicker lounge on the screened porch. It seemed cooler with the light off, so she sat in the dark, sipping the tart drink and resting. At first the voices had been muted, simply alto and baritone rhythms, then they had swelled and she caught phrases rising in passionate tones. Finally, there was no effort to hush their voices, and Dodie's anguish had cried across the night to Allison: "She's going to have a baby, and you expect me to be calm? How could you betray me so, and with a . . . a creature like that?"

Frank's voice had resounded with mocking laughter. "You can't be that much of an innocent! Do you honestly think your simple charms could be enough for a man like me? Susie wasn't the first, and you can be damned sure she won't be the last. Come on now, Dodie. You're a sweet kid, and your family's been real helpful in getting me where I want to go, but you just can't tie a man down."

Allison cringed, remembering Dodie's wounded cry. It had been followed by the slam of the screen door, then footsteps pounding across the porch and down the steps. The car door slammed and the engine roared

to life. Gravel spurted as Dodie took off into the darkness.

Only Dodie knew whether the smashup truly was an accident. Perhaps she had simply tried to numb the pain with speed—but she had been twenty-one and she never walked again.

The policeman cleared his throat. "Miss Ryder?"

"Yes?"

"I hope you'll excuse me for asking you so much about your friends and neighbors, but you see . . . well, it's all going to come out eventually, and I'm sure you'll be discreet. There are only three possibilities to account for Mrs. Patrick's death. Crippled as she was, she had no access to the supply of sleeping pills. They were kept in the bathroom and her husband gave them to her whenever she needed them. It may be that she hoarded her pills, hiding them from her husband somehow, until she had enough for a lethal dose, and took them herself. Or it could be that Mr. Patrick was careless—criminally careless—and she received an accidental overdose. Or . . ." and he paused, while Allison's eyes searched his. "Well, you realize, we must consider the, uh, possibility that . . . perhaps the overdose wasn't accidental. Mr. Patrick wouldn't be the first man burdened by a crippled

wife who took the wrong way out."

"Captain Barkley," Allison said. "There was no reason in the world for Dodie to kill herself. What does Frank say happened?"

"He insists she must have taken them herself. According to him she suffered a great deal of pain. He claims she must have saved up the sleeping pills, which rules out any chance of an accident. This is why I wanted to talk to you. You were very close to Mrs. Patrick. Was she in much pain?"

Allison's fingers unconsciously pleated the plum-colored fabric of the dress over her lap. Her head went a little higher, and an imperious generation spoke through her.

"I have already told you, there was no reason in the world for Dodie to kill herself. To my certain knowledge she was seldom, if ever, in pain. In fact, I can give you the names of three or four ladies who could confirm that fact, out of Dodie's own mouth. We'd often gather on the Patricks' front porch in the afternoon, so Dodie could be part of the group, and not a week ago we were discussing that case in the papers—you remember, the man who shot his wife because she was dying of cancer? Dodie was most upset. She was a dreadfully sym-

pathetic child. She was torn between her distress at his immoral action and her sympathy with his concern for his wife's suffering. 'Perhaps I might judge differently,' she said, 'if I were in pain myself. I'm one of the fortunates, suffering only from the handicap. But even if I were in pain, I don't believe that anyone but God has a right to take a life.' The other ladies will bear me out on this, captain."

Yes, she said to herself, we were discussing the case. Maybe nobody else noticed, it was so skillfully done, but Dodie herself was the one who maneuvered the conversation around to mercy killing. *I didn't know then, Dodie, but I can see now what you were doing.*

"Mrs. Patrick said herself that she was in no pain? Ever?"

"At the time of the accident, and for several months afterward, yes, she did have pain. But not recently. I never once heard her complain."

There now, Allison, she realized, you did tell a lie; you can't wiggle out of that one. The same night as that get-together you told him about, remember?—and Sunday night—and last night . . .

The scene had been the same all three nights, and the script had followed the same lines. Allison had been in her comfortable corner on the porch,

Snowball's faint purrs pulsing against her caressing hand, the creaking wicker of the lounge cool against her bare arms. That first night it had rained earlier, breaking the heat, and the lilac leaves had whispered wetly to each other in the dark. Gentle dripping from the eaves seemed to deepen the quiet, rather than break it. Dodie's blind had been pulled down only to the level of the raised window. The muted voices were carried across to her by the force of their intensity.

"Please, Frank! Please!" Never had Allison heard such pleading in Dodie's voice.

"I've told you, I just can't," he'd said. "If the pain's so bad, let me get a shot for you, or something. But you don't know what you're talking about, wanting to kill yourself."

"What good am I to anybody like this? And the pain—I just can't stand it any more." Her voice had risen with a startling anguish.

Allison, listening in spite of herself, had held herself tense, wondering. Just that afternoon Dodie had denied pain, yet now . . . Hot tears had welled in Allison's eyes as she listened to the tortured voice.

If she hadn't hated Frank so much for what he had done to Dodie, she might have been able to pity him as his voice

broke with indecision. "Dodie, I can't do it! Don't ask me to. Even if you're ready to die, think of the position you'd put me in. They'd say I killed you. Think of me, Dodie! They'd give me the chair!"

The argument had gone on. Three different nights Dodie had hammered away. Then last night, while Allison, hypnotized, watched the shadows shifting on the drawn blind, Dodie had played out her drama. She had won. Frank gave her the pills.

Allison had no longer felt the heat of the night. Chilled with horror, she had fought her own battle. Her throat had throbbed with a scream to that silent window. She couldn't let Dodie do this! But a thin hand to her lips cut off that scream before it sounded. What right did she have to interfere? Dodie must hate with an unsuspected fury to die for her revenge. She wouldn't thank Allison for stopping her now.

Allison had sat quietly. Soon the Patricks' light went out. Only then did she rise stiffly and plod to her bedroom, where no one could hear her poorly stifled sobs.

The white cat had followed her to the bedroom. One soft, easy leap settled him beside the tired, sorrowing old lady. Alli-

son remembered the day Dodie had brought him to her.

"Frank says he's allergic to cats, Miss Ryder. He won't have one in the house. But he's such a darling!" The vibrant face had gone quiet as she crooned over the kitten. "Snowball'd be a good name, don't you think? If you kept him, I could see him often. I could help groom him, and things. It wouldn't hurt so much if I knew you had him."

So Allison had kept Snowball, but Dodie had never visited him in his new home. The accident came only days later. That's what Allison resolutely called it, although she was very much afraid it was something else. Through those harrowing days the kitten grew, and comforted Allison. He was full-grown by the time Dodie left the hospital.

Please come home, Snowball, Allison begged in her heart, forgetful of the waiting policeman. I need you so. There's not much left for an old lady. I had Dodie and I had you. Now Dodie's gone. Snowball, don't you know how much I need you?

A tear that couldn't be restrained by a lifetime of self-discipline slipped down the wrinkled, gray cheek.

Captain Barkley, tactfully clearing his throat again, brought Allison back to the present. This policeman and his

questions! Allison was weary. Please, no more decisions . . .

Barkley hoisted himself out of the deep leather chair. "Well, Miss Ryder, I think you've told us what we need to know. One thing—when you get the chance, could you just write down the names of those other ladies you mentioned, who heard Mrs. Patrick say she suffered no pain? I won't trouble you now. I'll send a man by later today for it."

Dodie wins, Allison thought, but she felt no elation. Yes, Frank had killed Dodie, killed her youth and killed her innocence, and pummeled her spirit until she wanted to die. Yet, did Dodie, or did Allison, have the right to sentence him? Heedless of the waiting policeman, Allison closed her eyes momentarily, yielding to the grief that closed around her like a gray fog. Dodie was gone—but Allison didn't have to decide. All she had to do was let things go ahead without her, and all those other people would have to decide.

Allison struggled out of her chair. Captain Barkley rushed to help her, but she waved him aside. "Thank you, young man, but I have to do things by myself nowadays."

Yes, Allison, she mused, you have to do things by yourself. Once you make this decision,

don't fool yourself that somebody else sent Frank to the electric chair. They still execute murderers in this state, you know, and rightly speaking, Frank did not murder Dodie. For eighty-three years you've known right from wrong. You've faced up to truths, whether you liked the result or not. Now . . .

"Captain . . ." she started. Then her taut nerves jerked her like a marionette as the doorbell shrilled.

"I'll get it," the policeman offered.

It was another policeman, a close-shaven young man too big for his uniform, who bobbed his head respectfully to her, then turned to the captain. "Morrison says to tell you they're all finished over there, any time you're ready to go back to the station."

Captain Barkley glanced in speculation at Allison. Her expression told him nothing.

"I'll be out to the car in a minute." He held the door open for the younger man.

"Oh, and I thought I'd mention that we don't have to worry none about that big white cat the neighbors said was yowling early this morning. We found it in the Patricks' trash can. Somebody'd wrung its neck."

The captain nodded and turned back toward Allison where she stood by her overstuffed armchair, one hand lightly touching the back for support. Dodie smiled at him from the piecrust table.

"You were about to say . . . ?"

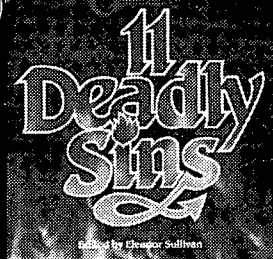
Allison reached to pick a white cat hair off of the chair beside her. "Yes . . . I was going to say I'll start on that list you wanted right away. You can send someone over for it in about half an hour. Good morning, captain."

Head erect, shoulders straight, she shuffled resolutely across the room to close the door behind him.

LET THE DEVIL AND ELLERY QUEEN TAKE YOU



Along the
tangled
paths of
vice and
sin. 21
fascinating
and
horrifying
stories.



Sin has
its own
rewards,
but is
it worth
the price?
You decide.
Read 11
DEADLY SINS.

Please send me the ELLERY QUEEN ANTHOLOGIES indicated.

Enclosed is my check or money order for \$ _____.

Mail to: **ELLERY QUEEN ANTHOLOGIES**

P.O. Box 40

Vernon, NJ 07462

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> #60 11 DEADLY SINS (\$4.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> #53 PRIME CRIMES 3 (\$4.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #59 MORE MEDIA FAVORITES (\$4.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> #51 PRIME CRIMES 2 (\$4.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #58 MEDIA FAVORITES (\$4.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> #50 MEMORABLE CHARACTERS (\$4.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #57 PRIME CRIMES 5 (\$4.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> #49 CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS (\$4.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #56 BAD SCENES (\$4.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> #47 LOST MEN (\$3.95) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #55 PRIME CRIMES 4 (\$4.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> #46 LOST LADIES (\$3.95) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #54 BLIGHTED DWELLINGS (\$4.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> #44 BOOK OF FIRST APPEARANCES (\$3.95) |

M9NC-6

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your copy. Available only in the U.S.

A Day at the Lake

by Ed Poole

Billy Joe was walking down Cedar Lake Road carrying his fishing rod over his shoulder and his tackle and bait in a burlap sack. The spring sun warmed his back through his T-shirt and his brogans made dusty little clouds as he walked down the dirt road. Woods bordered the narrow road so closely that two cars could pass each other only if both drove with their right wheels in the shallow ditches.

Billy Joe was daydreaming about what he would like to do tomorrow to celebrate his eighteenth birthday when he heard a siren in the distance. Daydream was about all he could do because Pa sure wasn't about to turn loose of any of his money. Ever since Ma died, Pa had been spending his money on hard liquor and the fancy ladies at Lonzo's Bar and Girl. Actually, it was Lonzo's Bar and Grill, but everyone called it Lonzo's Bar and Girl. Mostly just to aggravate Lonzo.

The siren was getting louder. Billy wondered why the sheriff would be coming down Cedar Lake Road with his siren on. The road dead-ended into Cedar Lake. Maybe someone drowned. Yeah, that was probably it. Billy stepped down in the ditch to get out of the way just in the nick of time.

A black BMW came hurtling over a small hill in the road, becoming airborne for an instant before slamming back to earth. As it shot past Billy Joe, someone threw a large brown paper sack out of the passenger side window. The sack ricocheted off a pine tree and fell into a big briar patch.

Before Billy Joe could move, the sheriff came roaring past with his blue lights and siren going. Billy Joe watched until the two cars disappeared over the hill overlooking the lake.

Billy Joe used a long stick to retrieve the sack from the briar patch. It felt pretty heavy. He unrolled the top and opened it. Inside was a large plastic storage bag of white powder. It must've weighed close to four pounds. Now Billy Joe knew where the money to celebrate his birthday would come from. In fact, he would probably be able to celebrate quite a few birthdays to come.

Billy Joe took the bag about three hundred yards farther into the woods and shoved it up inside a hollow at the base of a big oak tree. Once one of Billy Joe's hounds had chased a coon into that hollow. That didn't sit too well with Billy Joe because the dog was supposed to be trailing a deer Billy Joe had wounded. Billy Joe wedged the bag up in the hollow with pieces of dead limbs that were lying around under the big oak. It was a shame to see such a magnificent tree dying, but whatever was causing the insides of the oak to rot would eventually kill the rest of it.

With visions of visiting one of the fancy ladies at Lonzo's spinning in his head, Billy Joe took a shortcut through the woods to the lake. When he got there Sheriff Hamilton had his pistol trained on two men who were leaning against the side of the BMW while his deputy, Arthur Monroe, frisked them. One of them was tall and thin with long greasy hair and a pockmarked face. The other one had reddish-blond hair and the build of a fireplug.

"They're clean, sheriff," the deputy said as he stepped back from the men.

Sheriff Hamilton swore, and then he noticed Billy Joe. "Come on over here, Billy Joe. I want to talk to you."

Billy Joe sauntered over while taking another look at the two men. One of them turned his head to look at Billy Joe.

"Boy! You keep that head down like I told you or I'll tear it off," screamed Sheriff Hamilton. The man looked down quickly.

"Billy Joe, did you see these guys throw anything out of that car when they came past you?"

"No sir, sheriff. I didn't see nothing."

"Hmmm. I was thinking they might have popped over that little hill and thrown something out before they realized you were there. That was the only time they were out of my sight long enough to get rid of anything. Are you sure you didn't see them throw anything out of that car? Anything at all?" Sheriff Hamilton asked, squinting his eyes and looking down his nose at Billy Joe.

"I'm sure, sheriff. What did they throw out?"

"Never you mind. Get along with your fishing. And I better not find out you lied to me."

It was a fact that Sheriff Hamilton didn't feel the need to be nice to you if you couldn't vote. He'd have probably been a little nicer to Billy Joe if he had known Billy Joe turned eighteen tomorrow.

Billy Joe went down to the edge of the lake and started casting for large-mouth bass. While he fished, he kept looking back up the hill to see what Sheriff Hamilton was going to do with the two

men. Billy Joe's plan depended on their paying him a finder's fee for returning their property, and they couldn't do that if they were locked up.

Billy Joe could see but not hear Sheriff Hamilton raising hell with the men. He figured the sheriff didn't have anything to hold them on or they would already be on their way to jail. Deputy Monroe started walking back up to Cedar Lake Road, looking along both ditches as he walked.

Two large-mouth bass and an hour later the deputy returned empty-handed. The sheriff spat a glob of tobacco and stomped around screaming at the men. He finally stopped ranting and wrote the tall one a ticket. The man signed the ticket; then they got in their car and drove away with the deputy following closely.

Billy Joe settled down to do some serious fishing. If his plan worked, it would be a couple of hours before the men would be able to shake the sheriff and return.

It was closer to three hours before Billy Joe saw the BMW come over the hill. By then he had enough bass to last a month. He reeled his line in, put the fish and his tackle in the burlap bag, and waited in the shade of a pine tree for the men to walk down to him.

The tall one wasted no time. "Where's our stuff, hayseed?" he asked. The short one just scowled and opened and closed his hands. Trying to look menacing, Billy Joe supposed.

Billy Joe shrugged his shoulders and played the country bumpkin. "I don't believe I know what you're talking about. If you lost something, I'll be happy to help you look for it. Is there a finder's fee for the person who finds it for you?"

"Don't be stupid, kid," the short one said, rolling his shoulders and moving forward zigzag like a boxer. "I'll knock your ass out, and you'll wake up on the bottom of that lake."

Billy Joe held up his right hand to stop him. "Before you do anything rash, I think you ought to take a look behind you."

The short one kept his eyes on Billy Joe while the tall one looked. Sheriff Hamilton's car was sitting at the top of the hill.

"Okay, kid. We play it your way," the tall one said. "How much of a finder's fee do you want? Five thousand enough?"

Billy Joe thought for a minute. If he was willing to offer five thousand, he'd probably be willing to go higher. "No, I want ten thousand dollars to help you find what you're looking for."

The two men looked at each other. Then the tall one said, "All right, but it'll take us a couple of hours to get the money together.

How about we meet back here at midnight?"

"Fine," Billy Joe said. "You have the money; I'll have your stuff."

They went back to their car and drove slowly back up the hill past Sheriff Hamilton. While the sheriff was watching them, Billy Joe slipped into the woods that bordered the lake and started making his way back to where he'd left the bag. He didn't want to run into the sheriff again.

The sun hid behind a cloud, and a spring shower soaked Billy Joe as he ran through the woods. He rushed up to the hollow tree only to have his dreams come crashing down around him. The plastic bag and the paper sack it had been in were lying on the ground at the base of the tree, ripped to shreds. The rain had already washed away most of the powder, and what was left wasn't worth trying to save.

"Damn!" Billy Joe said. He must've trapped the coon in the tree, and the coon tore the bag to pieces getting out.

Billy Joe was not one to cry over spilt milk, but he knew those two guys were going to be mighty upset when he told them what happened to their powder. Come to think of it, they might not even believe him. Billy Joe thought for a few minutes and came up with what he figured was a pretty good plan to get himself out of this jam.

He set out for home at a jog. There was no time to waste. It was twilight and he was covered with sweat by the time he jogged into the yard. A few of the hounds barked halfheartedly at him. As he approached the house, he heard a low rumbling growl coming from under the front porch and he came to an abrupt halt.

"It's me, Boss. Good dog, good dog." Ignoring the hounds was one thing, but ignoring Boss was something nobody in his right mind did. Boss was Pa's catch dog, and Billy Joe along with half the surrounding county was scared spitless of him. Boss came out from under the porch and shook the dust from his short brindle coat. A massive brute, Boss was mean as a snake and feared neither man nor beast. A fact attested to by his tattered ears and the scars that decorated his muscular body. All the hounds gave Boss a wide berth.

Billy Joe stood without moving and let Boss sniff him to his heart's content. Boss had walked into the front yard two years ago, and while he acknowledged no owner, he showed no inclination to leave either. Visitors had to stand and be sniffed the same as Billy Joe. The only exception to this rule was Pa. And the only time Boss

and Pa acknowledged each other's presence was when they hunted wild hogs together.

When Boss went back under the porch Billy Joe darted into the house and plundered through the cupboard until he found a brown paper bag like the one the coon had torn apart. But try as he might he couldn't find any of the large plastic storage bags.

He ran back outside, dragged his rusty old bicycle from behind the barn, and started pedaling down the road to town. Pa usually stopped off at Lonzo's for a drink after work or he could've probably borrowed his truck. It was just as well, Pa would've given him the third degree about why he wanted to borrow it. And if Billy Joe told Pa he needed to go into town to buy a box of gallon size storage bags, Pa would quite naturally want to know what he needed them for. It was not a discussion Billy Joe wanted to have.

Twenty minutes later and out of breath, Billy Joe dropped his bicycle outside Cutter's IGA Foodliner and rushed inside just as Mr. Cutter was getting ready to lock up. Fortunately, Mr. Cutter was in a hurry to get home to his supper and didn't bend Billy Joe's ear with stories of his youth as he normally did.

Billy Joe fidgeted while Mr. Cutter counted out his change and then, after what seemed like an eternity, he rushed back outside. With the storage bags clutched under his arm, he pedaled home by the light of the full moon. As he pulled up into the yard and stood for Boss's inspection, it dawned on him that he had forgotten to buy anything to replace the powder with.

Billy Joe tore through the house looking for something, anything, white and powdery, silently thanking God that Pa still wasn't home. Finally he found an unopened sack of flour in a cabinet and filled one of the plastic bags with it. The weight felt right. Maybe in the darkness, the two men wouldn't be able to tell the difference.

Pa still wasn't back at eleven when Billy Joe headed for Cedar Lake. Much to his dismay, Boss came out from under the porch and decided to tag along. Billy Joe didn't want to chance angering Boss by trying to shoo him back.

Billy Joe got to the lake about eleven thirty and got out of sight in the shadow of a large oak tree. The moon illuminated the clearing where the men would park their car, and from where he stood, Billy Joe had a good view of everything. Boss wandered off down by the lake sniffing the ground.

While he was waiting, Billy Joe had a disturbing thought. What was to keep the men from killing him and just taking the powder

back? He racked his brain. How could he switch the powder for the money without getting himself killed?

The car topped the hill and pulled into the clearing. God! What could he do? Billy Joe could feel sweat trickling down his side. The two men got out and looked around for him. The tall one had a white cloth bag in one hand. Seeing the bag, Billy Joe decided to take his chances and stepped out of the shadows.

"Give me the stuff," said the tall one, pointing to the bag under Billy Joe's arm.

"The money first," said Billy Joe, trying to keep his voice from shaking.

"Guess again, kid," the short one said and pulled out a pistol. "Don't screw around with us if you know what's good for you."

"I'm-m-m not alone," said Billy Joe. "My friend is in the shadows. He's got a gun too!" Both men grinned and Billy Joe knew he hadn't fooled anyone.

The short one pointed the gun at Billy Joe. Billy Joe cursed himself for being such a fool and started praying.

Then from the shadows came a familiar low rumbling growl. Billy Joe stiffened. The two men turned toward the sound and the tall one said, "What the hell—"

Boss came out of the shadows running full speed, his hackles raised, his fangs glistening in the moonlight. He left the ground from ten feet away and hit the short man in the chest, knocking him into the tall one. Both men tumbled to the ground, and the cloth bag flew out of the tall man's hands.

Seizing the moment, Billy Joe dropped his brown paper bag, grabbed the cloth bag, and started running. He ran into the woods with the men's screams and Boss's snarls ringing in his ears. Billy Joe had no idea why Boss decided to attack and at that point he didn't care.

Billy Joe didn't stop running until he got home. Pa still wasn't there. He must really be tying one on at Lonzo's. In the security of his bedroom, Billy Joe opened the bag and breathed a sigh of relief. It was full of money. Ten thousand dollars just like they'd promised and all in brand new twenty dollar bills. They must have just drawn it out of the bank. Billy Joe hid the money under his mattress and fell asleep thinking about a certain redheaded fancy lady he knew who worked at Lonzo's.

The sun shining in his bedroom window awakened Billy Joe the next morning. He had a leisurely breakfast and took his second cup of coffee out on the front porch. Pa's truck was parked out

front. Billy Joe hadn't heard him come in, but that wasn't unusual. Billy Joe was a sound sleeper.

About fifteen minutes later Boss came walking into the yard, no worse for the wear and tear. Ignoring Billy Joe, he went to his customary place under the porch to lie down.

Billy Joe got dressed and puttered around the house most of the day trying to figure out how to explain his new-found wealth. He knew Pa would want to know where he got the money when Billy Joe walked into Lonzo's that night. Billy Joe finally decided that since he turned eighteen today, and was legally an adult, he didn't have to explain anything to anybody.

About four that afternoon, Billy Joe showered, dressed, and put some of the money in his wallet. He had hoped to get a ride to town with Pa, but Pa was still asleep. He figured that now that he was an adult it wouldn't look just right if he rode his bicycle into town. He decided he would hitchhike and was walking down the road when Sheriff Hamilton pulled off on the shoulder in front of him and stopped. The sheriff got out, the deputy stayed put. "Afternoon, Billy Joe," said Sheriff Hamilton, smiling.

The sheriff had never been nice to him before, and it made Billy Joe nervous. "Hello, sheriff."

"Got some news you might be interested in. You remember those two guys I stopped down by the lake yesterday, don't you? Well, it turns out they got killed by some drug dealers over in New Orleans. Seems they tried to sell them some flour. Imagine them trying something that stupid. Funny thing is, they were both covered with bite marks from a large animal. Isn't that odd?"

"Yeah, I guess so," said Billy Joe, wondering how much the sheriff knew.

"You know what else those guys were into? Counterfeiting. They made counterfeit twenties. Not very good ones. Not good enough to fool anyone who was paying attention."

Billy Joe's heart sank. Damn! All that money was counterfeit. There went his birthday celebration.

"Get in, Billy Joe," the sheriff said, smiling again and opening the car door.

"W-W-Why? What'd I do?" Billy Joe asked, trying to keep from panicking.

"Nothing. At least nothing I can prove. I saw you all dressed up and I just figured you were going to town to register to vote and needed a ride. I'm always available to assist my constituency, you know."

Tall Tommy and the Millionaire

by S. S. Rafferty

Thank God February has only twenty-eight days because it is the worst month for business at the bistro I own on Third Avenue. Right after the holidays my society swells start their exodus to Palm Springs, the Riviera, or places that are invariably named Costa Del Something and cost del everything. By February first, I could rent the joint out as a warehouse or a branch of Campbell's Funeral Home. This can be very depressing to a standup comic like me, so in February, I relax the house charge account limit and let my riffraff pals in for the company of it. Costly, but comforting. Without an audience, I veg out.

The only problem is on the first Monday in the month. The assemblage in the bar lounge is paying more attention to Tall Tommy Tanuka than they are to me.

Ingrates.

But who's to cavil. Tall Tommy is the best in his business, which is being a professional liar. I don't mean like an ad man or a PR guy—mere pickers. Tall Tommy is world class in mendacity, and he makes

one swell living at it, too, which is another reason not to cavil because at least he's paying cash for his potables.

You see, Tall Tommy Tanuka sells lies to people in tight spots. For instance, let's say a guy gets lost with a bimbo for a couple of days and wants to go home to wifey. What excuse is he going to use? Most of us would come up with some wimp-type lie that a cloistered nun could see through. But call in Tall Tommy, and man, you've got yourself a beauty, a scenario complete with all the trimmings. He is so good that in his presence polygraph machines blow fuses and truth serum curdles.

So it's around eleven P.M. of this Monday in a dreary February, and Tall Tommy is telling us about a mob type who's on his deathbed over in Jersey and calls for Tanuka's services. The hood knows that his minutes are numbered, and he wants a great story to tell St. Peter so he can get inside the gates of heaven. It's the high point, the apex, of Tall T's career—he's going to put one over



"OKAY, THEN, LET'S GET OUT OUR PAINT SET AND COVER THE TOWN."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on God. Now that's chutzpah; that's a pro!

His rendition is so terrific it is moving Barry Kantrowitz, my partner (and former agent, when I was working the flat floors on the road) to tears.

"You know, Chick," Barry says to me, "this is the *ligner* of *ligners*. Even God would believe him!"

I didn't get to answer him because there was someone at my elbow, someone I was glad to see because he is my favorite millionaire and we sorely needed another paying guest. Jay Porter Pemberton is a Wall Street type, old money, stuffy, but a very nice guy. He looked awful.

"Could I speak with you privately, Chick?"

My "sure, Jay Porter," and his "privately" didn't make a dent in Barry, who came along with us to the back office. Pemberton didn't seem to mind, so I let it ride, but I thought he should have stayed. One of these days he's going to need a plausible fib to tell the Big Booking Agent in the Sky. Boy, does he have things to answer for—like screwing up my career.

I grabbed the chair behind the desk before Barry could get to it. A guy behind a desk is always in control. Barry flopped on the leather couch, but Pemberton preferred to pace up and down like that poor puma I love

over in the Central Park Zoo. (I'm going to turn that blue-eyed thing loose someday.)

"Why don't you take a seat, Jay Porter? The broadloom needs a rest."

"Chick," he said nervously, taking one of the Eames chairs facing me, "I came to you because I haven't any place else to turn. You're experienced in such matters, and . . ."

He had taken a paper from his jacket pocket and was waving it about as he rambled on. I reached over and took it from him. Rude, perhaps, but the suspense was becoming too intense. It was a Xerox copy of a letter from a lawyer in Providence, Rhode Island, to someone named Samson Velker on East 89th Street in Manhattan, advising him of a legal strategy. It seems Jay Porter had been playing kissy-kissy with Velker's wife, Gina. Now I understood the "you're experienced in such matters" statement. I wasn't insulted—a guy with three divorces behind him is beyond insults.

Barry gets into the act by coming to the desk and reading over my shoulder. "Having a conversation with a man's wife is criminal?" he asks. "A million dollar conversation!"

"Criminal conversation is a concept in common law," Jay Porter explained. "It gives a

spouse the exclusive privileges of sexual relations with his partner. I looked it up. Rhode Island is a common law state."

I re-read the letter. "Jay Porter, this is like an alienation of affections thing, and they never stand up. What you need is a lawyer."

"No, Chick. Alienation and conversation are two different things. A loss of affection is almost impossible to prove. But that's not the point. It's the ensuing publicity that could destroy my name and my marriage. I'm an elder of my church, and my clients are all..."

"Take it easy, pal."

He didn't. "...and I can hardly go to a lawyer with a copy of a purloined letter. No ethical attorney would..."

"Jay Porter, STOP!" He did. "Now, slowly and calmly, lay it all out like you would a prospectus on a new stock issue."

Believe me, if he writes a prospectus in the same garbled, confused way he told me the Velker story, American finance is in big trouble. Somehow I put it all together and shuffled it into a neat pack, with all the suits in the right place. I'll deal it out to you painlessly.

That afternoon, Jay Porter had received the copy of the letter in the mail, from a girl

named Lisa Banks who worked as a secretary in a Providence law office.

"Lisa is the only daughter of an elderly fisherman who did odd jobs up at my summer place in Newport," Jay Porter explained. "Unfortunately, he was injured in a docking accident, and I covered all his expenses and put him on a retainer and paid Lisa's way through secretarial school in Boston. The old man died last year, and although the daughter owes me nothing, I guess she felt she was repaying me somehow by sending me a copy of that letter. Of course I appreciate the warning, but she *has* put herself in legal jeopardy, so I can't get legal counsel down here until this Providence lawyer, Procutto, contacts me."

It gets worse, lots worse. Old Jay Porter started down the road to bankruptcy on January 16th, when a severe wind and ice storm decided to raise hell along the New England coast.

"I have a look-in caretaker of sorts, who lives in Newport, but when I called for a report on the storm, he was sick in bed. There's been a lot of looting up there lately after winter storms, so I told Seth I'd be up myself. When I got there the next morning, it wasn't all that bad. Part of the wharf and hangar were gone..."

"Hangar!" Barry was impressed. "You keep a plane up there?"

"Heavens, no," Jay Porter assured him with a millionaire's aplomb, "the Jet Star is kept at LaGuardia. The 'hangar' is really a boathouse, like the winter one at our Little Neck place, but hydroplane people call them hangars. You've met my wife Byerle, Chick. She's a hydroplane enthusiast. Her father was Skip Dorlan, who was killed in the World Cup race in '68—a terrible tragedy—and to console my wife, I've been underwriting Skip's Sea Dart boat and crew. Lord, I could keep a string of racehorses for what that program costs me. More to the point, however, Byerle was in Jamaica to observe the Carib trials, dash the luck. If she'd been with me, this . . . this *person* wouldn't have a leg to stand on. When I told Byerle on the phone about my trip, she was against it. Should have listened."

"Bad break, Jay Porter," I said, "but even more to the point, how's about Mrs. Gina Velker?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Well, the main house was in fine shape, and since the snow had started again, I decided to spend the night. Around eight o'clock, there was a frantic pounding on

the door, and I found this woman standing there freezing to death. Her car had skidded off the main highway, and she saw my lights. She must have walked a mile across open fields to get there, poor thing."

"She isn't going to be a *poor* thing if her hubby gets a million bucks out of you. You said woman, Jay Porter. How old? Looks?"

"Well, she's in her late twenties, I would estimate, attractive, quite pleasant."

"And she spent the night, right?"

"Well, actually," he hesitated, "she spent the weekend. It was late Monday afternoon before the phones went on again and I could get us plowed out."

"Okay, now the hard part. Did you have a conversation with her?"

"Oh, quite a lot, even though we didn't have too much in common."

"*Criminal* conversation, Jay Porter. Did you shake her bones?"

The elder of the church looked horrified. "Chick, need I remind you that I am a gentleman."

The poor dope meant it, and I believed him. He is a gentleman with a capital G, a true rarity. Most of my friends can be described with a capital B, but not Jay Porter Pemberton.

The clincher to the whole mess is that, when they got plowed out and got to her car, it had a busted axle, and he drove her back to New York, stopping for lunch and dinner along the way. He had been seen with her by half the people in southern New England, which is one passel of witnesses—garage men, snow plow operators, waitresses, the whole works.

"It's a *sticklech*," Barry says with a yawn from the couch. He was lying down. Jay Porter gives me a quizzical look, since Yiddish is not his long suit.

"*Sticklech*. A trick—a scam—the old bamboozle."

"But that's preposterous, Chick. Gina was a very nice woman. Not refined in the proper sense, but certainly a decent person."

"Decent, he says!"

"Shut up, Barry," I snapped. "Jay Porter, you've got a hassle and a half on your hands. I still think you should see a lawyer, purloined letter or not. First thing you have to determine is whether it's a scam or a legit misunderstanding on the husband's part."

"If you want to test a lie," Barry said from flat on his back, "ask a master *ligner*. Ask Tall Tommy Tanuka."

My prone partner has an idea,

so with Jay Porter's permission, I invite Tommy T back to the office. While I dealt Tall Tommy the story (burying the identities, of course), the *ligner* of *ligners* sat drinking Metaxa and beer, which is a disgusting sight. When I finished, he said, "If it is a scam, the best defense is impotence. I had a client once in Chicago who . . ."

"We don't want to allow it to get into court, Tall Tommy. The guy never laid a glove on her, that's flat."

"I'm not talking about court, man, I'm talking about defense. If it's a scam, it busts it sky high. Even if it's a misunderstanding, it still blows it to hell. Now, this guy in Chicago took my advice and got outa the jam by taking some female hormones on the sly and then he gets himself examined by some sex doctors who pronounce him sexually dead."

Barry groaned from the couch. "This is a good way to save money?"

"Well, he beat the rap," Tall T said triumphantly, "only now he's living with a twenty-year-old boy model in Evanston and his wife is suing him for divorce. I didn't have to tell you the last part, fellas, but when Tanuka makes a lie, he always tells the truth about it."

Jay Porter is turning green, so being behind the desk, I ex-

ercise control. "You're missing the point, Tall Tommy. We want to know if the broad showing up at this guy's Newport house in a snowstorm was *sticklech* or legit."

He pondered. "Legit; as far as the snowstorm. Who could make up snow? The busted car, maybe. If it's a scam it was probably cooked up after the fact. I'll make a morning line of ten to one the wife showed up three days late and tells the truth to this bozo and it gives him ideas. Now, the nut of the matter is that the mark is going to lose some jack . . ."

"Money isn't the problem," Jay Porter said as aloofly as only a millionaire can, "it's the publicity. To offer them a bribe wouldn't solve anything. Black-mailers never stop at one payment."

Tall Tommy is a little miffed at being interrupted. "As I was about to say, *unless* he fights fraud with fraud."

"Lay it out, Tall Tommy."

"It's simple, Chick. The bozo is claiming this mark lured his wife into an affair, and that makes the lawyers pant like hounds for a contingency slice. But if the lawyers find out that this dame plays around with more than one guy, they drop the case because they haven't got one."

"Why, that's immoral! You're

suggesting we tarnish this woman's reputation!"

Tall Tommy gives me a "who's this hoople" look.

"He's an elder of his church," I explain.

"That's not a very original scheme, Tall Tommy. It used to work in paternity suits before they got those blood tests up to snuff, but this is different." That's Barry's two cents.

"I don't mean a whole bunch of guys giving phony affidavits; that's for punks and it's bad lying. All you need is to have her seen with a guy with a notorious reputation, a real rat with women. Let the bozo's lawyer get a sniff of that and the ballgame's over." He got to his feet. "That's all I can do for you gents. It's the impotence dodge, the rat caper, or, well, you could have them knocked off."

When the door closed behind him, Barry sat up. "I like the Don Juan angle," he said with a leer, and I know exactly what's going on in that crafty agent's brain of his. Come February 28th, we will have to come up with five G's on the mortgage and another ten to keep us going until the swells come home. He looked at me and then at my millionaire.

"Hell, no!" I shouted.

Operation Gina Velker started two days later (three

bars of "Just a Gigolo," please). Two days, because that's how long it took Cy Tregannon, a P.I. I know, to put together the stakeout, the movement pattern, and the general poop on the Velkers. Tregannon dished it up with a written report and some fuzzy pix via a telephoto lens. First, the report:

"The Velkers are out to give the impression that Jay Porter has tossed a wrench into their marriage works, so Samson has moved out of the nest into a one room dump on the rim of the barrio several blocks north of the modest digs they used to call home on 89th near the East River. Samson works as a clerk in a local dry cleaners, and all Gina seems to do is shop in neighborhood stores."

The telephoto pix didn't meld much excitement to the deal. When Samson Velker's ma and pa hung that monicker on him, they either had great expectations in genealogy or faith in high protein diets. They lost. He looked like he was put together with only half a box of Tinker Toys—he was thin, knobby-jointed, and fragile. The guy was a mugger's dream, which wouldn't hurt his case in a courtroom once the solid, muscle-toned, tanned lecher-millionaire showed up. But, since the entire exercise was to keep it out of court, I concen-

trated on Gina. Not that Tregannon's pictures gave me much to concentrate on except the regulation New York woman's winter wear—bulk. She looked like a sausage in boots.

To make matters worse, I couldn't plan the strategy myself because my partner Bigmouth Barry had gathered the merry men, who considered themselves responsible for all the aspects of my young life. First and not foremost, Mario Puccini, who runs a limo for hire out of East 76th Street, only I seem to be the only soul who has his phone number. Then, of course, we have the boys from the club staff: Jack McCarthy, my kitchen manager; Guido LaSalle, my chief chef; Cuz D'Amico, the lead barkeep; Ling, the *maitre d'*; Barry; and one invitee, Tall Tommy Tanuka. Not one of them ever agrees with me except Guido, and he's usually squiffed.

"I like the supermarket ploy," says Guido.

"I don't," says Barry. "Who's going to believe Chick even knows what the inside of a supermarket looks like?"

"The broad won't know that," Cuz says. I don't know whether he's defending me or just the idea. And I *do* know what the inside of a supermarket looks

like, by the way, at least through the windows.

Now Barry gets cute. "Okay, Chick, what's the first thing you do when you go into a supermarket?"

"You take a number from the ticket machine, wise guy, so you can get faster service."

"That's a deli, not a supermarket."

I looked around at the group. "Well, does anyone know what is the first thing you do in a supermarket? I mean, come on, guys, this has to look natural if she's going to tumble."

All I'm getting is dumb looks, which is all you can expect from a bunch of guys who get up at six P.M., live all night in tuxedos, and consider phoning out for chow mein home cooking.

Cuz comes to the rescue. "I guess it's the same in the city. Over in Jersey, they have these baskets on wheels."

"Wheels," I said, getting an idea. "Wheels could set up a collision scene. I crash into this Gina Velker. 'So sorry,' I say, 'how about a drink.' Zap! I'm on my way."

"Very bad."

"Why, Tall Tommy?"

"Because these Velkers love lawsuits. You're going to end up in court."

"I told you the supermarket stuff stank." Barry plays Mr. Paraquat. "Does this broad own

a dog? She's got to own a dog. Everyone in New York owns a dog. I read in the paper that there are more dogs than people here."

"Someone must have my quota," I said. "Why a dog, Barry?"

"We get you the same kind of dog and you walk it on her street. It's a great way to pick up girls."

"No dog," Jack Mac reports. "But the supermarket idea would work if Chick let the broad smash into *him*!"

They all looked at each other in agreement, which was easy for them, since I was the one who had to take the lumps. Besides, I had other qualms: suppose she didn't like me?

"Boy, if I knew when I left the house this morning," Gina Velker was saying across the tablecloth, "that I would almost cripple a *star* and end up playing Florence Nightingale and having lunch at 21—*wow*. Is that Tom Brokaw over there?"

"Who?"

"Tom Brokaw. You know, the *Today* show? Jane Pauley, Gene Shalit?"

I could have told her I'd never seen the *Today* show, since I usually sleep till noon or better, but not wanting to rock her boat, I glanced at the next table

and whispered to her, "That's ol' Tommy, all right."

It seems all my qualms about my appealing to her were for naught. My luncheon guest was a celebrity junkie, a TV addict, and a professional fan. Instead of a brain, she had a cathode ray tube. Her addiction, however, was a Godsend to the plot, because one of the local channels was re-running the hell out of a sci-fi bomb I made ten years ago. She recognized me when I took the dive in the supermarket and "helped" me to Doc Dranger's office on the West Side, where my ankle was taped and a cane supplied. (Doc Dranger is a friend of Tall Tommy. He is short on ethics and long on whiplash scams and gunshot wounds.)

When we left Dr. Dranger's, I kept the hustle in motion by offering her lunch at 21. Although she was OD'ing on bliss, it wasn't a rubberneck's awe. She seemed to know that you just don't stroll into 21 at twelve thirty without a reservation and get seated at Table 3.

"The Benchley corner!" she said after Walter had gotten us settled and the drink order was taken. "Did you know Otto Preminger had a fight here over the film rights to *In Cold Blood*? Chick, you have clout. But how come we didn't go to your restaurant?"

"Because a lot of people keep coming up to the table for a smooze, and I wouldn't have a minute to get to know you better."

She blushed happily. "Tom Brokaw has a high P.Q., you know," she said. "What's your P.Q., Chick?"

"P.Q.?"

"Personality Quotient. You know, like I.Q. All stars have P.Q.'s or else they wouldn't be stars. P.Q.'s are different from R.Q.'s . . ."

She went on to tell me about Recognition Quotients (mine was high, according to her) and how, despite Brokaw's likability, the Nielsen ratings hadn't been tiptop on the *Today* show.

I sat there going into a reality warp. Here I was, sitting in a restaurant filled with people who made handsome livings in all forms of communications and finance and who spoke their own trade lingo, and this average housewife sounded just like them. Maybe it came through the air and you absorbed it via osmosis. But the main difference between Gina and the media types and moguls surrounding us was that she believed it all without question. The kid was like a comatose patient hooked up to a vital life support system that pumped fantasy and vicarious involvement into her.

The plan called for me to squire her around town and get our names in the columns—a real press agent push. With her addiction, she seemed like a sitting duck, but I had to test her F.Q. (that's Fidelity Quotient, folks). I dangled a fix before my heavy user.

"Frank Sinatra," I said, so low it was barely audible. But celebrity freaks have built-in sonar.

"Where?" Her head swiveled a hundred and eighty degrees east and west, and then she turned sideways to sweep north and south. "Where?"

"Where what?"

"Frank Sinatra. You said *Frank Sinatra!*"

"Oh, I must have mumbled out loud, Gina. Forgive me. I was reminding myself to give him a call about next Tuesday night."

"You are seeing Frank Sinatra on Tuesday? Really, Chick?"

"On the contrary, Gina. I *won't* be seeing Frank on Tuesday. My date wouldn't want to go to the United Charities Ball with a guy with a gimp leg."

It's working like an ounce of gold in a bear market. She's drooling. And she was about to have her credibility sullied with the Providence legal eagle.

"You mean to tell me," Gina is appalled, "that the girls in

your set" (*set yet!*) "would turn down a fellow for a date because he had a limp? A temporary limp, at that?"

"Well, you know how it is, Gina. A lot of these Hollywood types dote on physical perfection . . ."

"Farrah Fawcett!"

"Where?"

"No, not here, Chick. I mean, that's your date, right? Don't bother to deny it. I never liked her. Big deal, she was married to the Six Million Dollar Man for a while . . ."

It was obvious that Farrah was at the top of Gina's hate parade at the moment, and Suzanne Somers, Cher, and, for some reason, Penny Marshall were tied for a close second. Listening to Gina was like a trip through the junk tabloids. Finally, she got down to it.

"You know, Chick, I have half a mind to say I'll go to that ball with you myself, but . . ."

"I know . . . I know . . ." I lowered my eyes woefully (eat your heart out, O'Toole!) "... I noticed the wedding band three hours ago."

"Oh, Chick," she bubbled, "you really *are* shy. Actually, at the moment, I'm estranged. You know, like Burt Bachrach and Angie Dickinson . . . he lives in L.A. and she's in Beverly Hills. Just giving each other some space. Same with Samson and

me. The reason I'm hesitant about dating you is that I'm bound to bump into Laszlo Milne in your set."

I had been able to keep up pretty well with her stellar stream of showbiz consciousness. Will Doris Day and Barry Comden have a *reswoonion* some day . . . will Sally get Burt . . . will Sly really stay with Sasha this time . . . all this I could follow. But a Laszlo Milne? In my set?

"Laszlo Milne, the director of *Tomorrow's Children*. If we meet, he'll probably make a scene."

I knew that *Tomorrow's Children* was a soap opera, and she filled in the rest. She had spotted a continuity booboo on the show—actress walks into elevator wearing scarf, gets off without one—sent it in to one of the tabloid TV blooper columns, and got twenty dollars and a write-up.

"Gina, that's the continuity girl's flub. It happens once in a while, and a director could care less. How long have you and your husband been estranged?"

Well, she sure had been chock full of information about Angie and Burt and Doris and Barry and Sly and Sasha, but on Gina and Samson, she was a big "no comment" except to imply that a *reswoonion* was not immi-

nent. But it gave me a clear shot, and I had started setting up our rendez-woo when I damned near choked on a cherrystone clam.

The geography of the first floor saloon room at 21 puts Benchley's corner directly in view of the entry from the outer lobby, and what do I see? I see Byerle Dorlan Pemberton standing at the reception desk. Panic time for me. Her husband always sits at Number 5, which is directly across from us, or at least he did when I was bopping around town with him. If somewhere out there in the lobby is Jay Porter taking wifey to lunch, and if Byerle gives me a wave and Gina is hip to my knowing the millionaire, it is goodbye mortgage money. It was time to move.

"Where are you going, Chick? Oh, sandbox. Take it easy on the ankle."

I "painfully" made my way across the saloon and into the foyer.

"Oh, hello. Chick Kelly, isn't it? Have you had an accident?"

"Sprained ankle," I said, looking around unsuccessfully for Jay Porter. I turned back to Byerle, which is not too hard to do. The Caribbean sunkiss still clung to her tinted skin, which heightened the blonde in her hair and the famous Dorlan good looks. But although old

Skip may have put his physical imprint into this long, lean beauty, his devil-may-care style didn't take. Byerle Porter was a bit of a stick, and prone to looking down her nose at things; but then, come to think of it, that fitted her husband's world.

"Jay Porter with you?"

"No, heavens no," she said, her eyebrows arching. "Not during the Levcott merger."

"The only reason I'm asking is that the saloon is very noisy today and . . ."

"... and Jay Porter hates babble," she interrupted. "I know, that's why his fascination with your place has always amazed me. I won't be sitting in the saloon anyway. Mr. Pete has a table for us up in the Bottle Room. We're meeting Phil Dunn from *Sports Illustrated*. Oh, here you are, Buzz, late as usual."

"Sorry, Mrs. P." The speaker was what my niece would call a blond hunk. He had just brought his tanned face, blond hair, and snow white teeth in from 52nd Street to warm our spirits better than the fireplace crackling in the small lounge area of the lobby.

I guess Byerle felt she had to be polite. "Buzz, meet Chick Kelly." Then, to me, "Buzz Tierney is the lead driver on the Sea Dart—my father's hydroplane."

I shook hands, or rather, I

stuck mine out and had it worked over as if it were a bilge pump.

"Hey, Chick," he said with exuberance, "been to your place a couple of times. Very funny stuff." He turned to his boss. "Dunn here yet?"

"No, but we'll go up anyway." She gave an imperial nod to Harry behind the reservation desk, who rebounded it to Freddie, the stairway escort, and off they started, to my relief. Byerle was almost out of earshot, but I could hear her unladylike response to something Tierney told her. "Damn it, you promised it would work. Suppose Jay Porter finds out."

That little piece of patty cake was none of my business, so I got back into my act and entered the "sandbox" and gabbed with Otis, the attendant, for a few seconds before heading back to Miss Stars-In-Her-Eyes.

She had a hurt look on her face. "They were nobodies, Gina. I do know *some* nobodies."

"That's *all* I know . . ." she smiled "... except for you, Chick."

That was lunch. By ten o'clock that night, Gina Velker was definitely on her way to becoming a somebody.

To pull it off, I was calling in a lot of owed favors from news guys, columnists, and PR flacks.

Thursday morning's newspapers carried gossip column items about Chick Kelly's new heartthrob, and one of the tabloids had a picture of us at Studio 54, non-dancing. Since most of the real celebrities were out of town, I was getting more attention than I actually deserved. By noon, the local TV gossip hens were on the phone, and I gave each of them a little tidbit to nibble on. For instance, my "no comment, give me a break, she's a married lady" statement got us two whole minutes on the six o'clock news' "People and Places" segment. I knew we were in clover when the junk tabloids started phoning in for the dirt.

But all this razzmatazz was nothing to what I had planned for Thursday night. It was snowing hard when I rang Gina's doorbell at eight fifteen. I expected to find a wide-eyed lady who had been stunned by her instant celebrity. Instead, I was the stunned one and she was the stunning. For a second, I didn't think it was the plain Jane dame I had dragged around town the night before.

"Elizabeth Arden," she said, touching her perfectly manicured nails to her professionally made up face. Even the mousy off-blonde hair had been touched with soft gold. "Halston," she went on, as she pir-

ouetted to show me the flare of a sexy crepe outfit.

Damn it, the girl was a knockout, and I found myself wishing she weren't a crook. But crook she was, at least so my further information from Tregannon, the private investigator, had indicated. It seemed that Samson Velker was so dumb and such a mope that dreaming up the criminal conversation scheme was beyond him, which left only my darling date as the heavy.

"Very nice, Gina," I said, taking off my topcoat. "Must have cost a quid or two."

She kissed me on the cheek. "That's a thank you, not an invitation; at least not yet. Thank you for my chrysalis. I looked it up. It's a butterfly coming out of the cocoon. I don't mean just getting gussied up or buying new clothes, either. I got this dress on markdown. I'm a good shopper. Always have been, but until I met you, I never had the courage to buy one. Maybe courage is the wrong word. Confidence? Poise? I don't know, but I feel like saying to the world, 'Damn it, look at me!' That's always been my problem, Chick. I've been too shy. I was a wallflower at dances and a secretarial school dropout because taking dictation embarrassed me. Hell, I only had one real girlfriend in my entire

life to share things with. I guess I ended up married to Samson because he posed no threat. Why am I going on like this? I salute you, Chick Kelly, my Pygmalion."

I was half expecting an orchestra to play "I Could Have Danced All Night," but the other half of my brain was taking care of business. "You realize that we are what's known as an item," I said. I wanted to see if she had gotten any flak from Samson. Obviously she had him on a string because she only kissed me again and said, "Good. I've always wanted to be an item. Is that champagne?"

I held up the gaily wrapped bottle and presented it to her. When I had asked Jack Mac to select a bottle from the joint's wine cellar, I hadn't realized he was going to make a packaging production out of it. "Ah yes, m'deah, a touch of the bubbly." I gave her some James Mason.

"It's like being with ten different people," she said with childlike glee. Rich Little would have made her blow a fuse. "Let's not open it now, Chick. I want to save this for a special moment."

"Okay, then let's get out our paint set and cover the town."

We started with *blanquette de pecheur* at Lutece, some jazz and juleps at Bechets, and on to the eleven thirty show at the

Rainbow Room. Later, we hit the Improv (I did six minutes—pro's privilege) and the disco at Regine's. Note that here I am trotting all over town when I own my own joint, but Jay Porter is picking up the tab, and besides, I want to spread the "hot item" stuff around.

All of this activity is mere prelude to my blockbuster, which came the next night, or rather at twelve twenty-seven Saturday morning. I know the exact time because that's what the arresting officer put on the rap sheet when we were hauled into the 19th Precinct with the rest of the high rollers from Monk Doyle's private gambling den on Third Avenue in the 70's.

Of course, if Monk ever finds out that I had a hand in tipping the cops to his newest location (and arranging for the press to be on hand), it will be cement shoes and East River time for yours truly, but I never liked Doyle anyway, so I took the chance.

The guys with the flashguns had a ball, and thanks to our previous exposure, Gina and I got all the attention. Somehow or other, my lawyer, Ted Summers, got us out on a legal maneuver and Mario was waiting with his limo to whisk us to the

Plaza, where I had reserved a suite.

"But why can't I go home, Chick? A hotel is silly."

"You won't think so when you see the morning papers, Gina. Your phone won't stop ringing, believe me, and chances are you won't be able to get your number changed until Monday, so you're better off at the Plaza."

"No. I'm going home. I'm sorry, but that's it. As for the phone, I'll take it off the hook. Driver . . ." She gave him the address (which Mario already knew) and there went the frosting on my discredibility cake. She pecked my cheek goodnight at her front steps, said she was tired, and left me standing in a new snowfall.

"Whatcha think, Chick?" Mario says from the driver's seat as we pull away from the curb. "She could be hip to the plan. Maybe the raid was overkill."

"I don't know, Mario. Something spooked her. Maybe it was the sight of all the blue coats and the seven minutes she spent in a cell. That could have put some cold reality into the consequences of breaking the law."

"It's early. You want to go to the joint?"

I looked out at the snow still coming down at a good clip and

said no, and for the first time in twenty years, I was in bed alone at one o'clock in the morning.

Maybe breaking one lifelong precedent sets you up for another, because I woke up to an insistent buzzing. Half an opened eye told me it was two fifteen and the dark outside told me it was still *ante meridian*. The world knows that Chick Kelly does not speak on the phone before noon, but I broke another rule and picked up the receiver. Big problem. I'm listening to a dial tone with one ear and hearing the buzzing with the other. It's the bloody doorbell, and if I don't speak on the phone before noon, you can bet a bundle that I don't answer front doors before one.

The buzzing suddenly turned to knuckle rapping, and as I lay there getting the blood reintroduced to my brain, I expected the next noise would be the boom of a battering ram. Give 'em an inch and, well, you know the rest.

On my way down the hall and across the living room, I'm figuring out ways to kill whoever's beating the hell out of my door. I know it isn't the Girl Scouts with cookies because they're a civil bunch, bill collectors always dun me at the club, and even my ex-wives' lawyers al-

ways send their letters, threatening as they are, via express mail. I figured strangulation or bludgeoning by fist would have to do since I wasn't carrying a gun but, to my surprise, my early morning caller was.

I don't have to tell you that my entire attention was on the gun, so a description of its bearer will be scant. He was shortish and probably on the thinnish side under his soiled trenchcoat. In spite of the gun, my comedian's brain was wondering why a guy who works in a dry cleaners walks around with a filthy coat. Samson Velker looked even more haggard in the flesh than he had in Cy Tregannon's telephoto prints.

"What's your problem, pal?" I asked as I slowly brought my hand up to the inside doorknob.

Velker may be rated as a dope, but he sees good. "Don't try to slam it, Kelly. I didn't come to use it this time, but I can, and I will. This is a warning. Stay away from my wife or I'll kill you." His voice sounded shaky and he delivered the threat as if he were doing a bad imitation of Jimmy Cagney. "No more dates, you hear?"

"Anything you say, mister, but would you mind telling me who you are?" This, friends, is not false bravado. Down the hall, I can see an apartment door open a crack, so I know

that Mrs. Rosen is on duty as the eleventh floor *mensh*. I wanted a witness. Velker and I were having our own criminal conversation, and it could include an "assault with a deadly weapon" charge.

"You know goddamned well who I am, Kelly. How many wives are you fooling around with, anyway?"

"Let's not get personal. Who's your wife?"

"Gina Velker!" He shouted it loud and clear, which was swell, because now all the neighbors knew. "And if you so much as talk to her on the phone, I'll put a bullet where you'll turn soprano."

With this finally off his chest, he whirled awkwardly on his heels and stalked down the hall to the elevator. I watched his retreat, his meatless stooped shoulders trying to swagger, his old fashioned fedora tilted forward on his head, a hand buried deep in the pocket of his dirty raincoat clutching his courage. Exit the pathetic gunman.

When the elevator doors closed behind him, I stage-whispered down the hall to Mrs. Rosen's still cracked doorway. "Hey, Mrs. R," I said, "don't forget a word of anything you just heard. It's important. Write it down, even."

With this, her door opened

wide enough for her hairnetted head to appear. "You're a bum, Kelly. That I already knew, a regular Don Juan bummer, and now they come to get you with guns. Good idea you should be a soprano..." the door was closing "...girls coming and going day and night like a harem..." Silence. You will note Mrs. R is not a fan.

The gambling bust happened too late to make the early bird editions, and it was just as well because if, before his visit, Velker had seen what the later morning editions eventually carried, he would have plugged me on the spot. It must have been a slow night for news, for the press pulled out all the stops. Take the headline EAST SIDE RAID BAGS POSH ROLLERS. This was played off against a four column shot of Gina and me getting into the police van. The cutline read: "COMIC AND CUTIE TO HOOSEGOW AFTER CASINO SWEEP. Chick Kelly, restaurateur/funny man and socialite Gina Velker off to tell it to the judge following gaming bust."

I thought the socialite bit was over-reach, but at least they spelled her name right and the rest of it was pure gravy. When that Providence lawyer learned that the poor waif of the storm was really a jaded swinger with

a rep and a rap against her, my mortgage was secure.

I was reading about my public shame over steak and eggs at Table 36 in my joint's lower tier dining room at noon. Normally, this area is only open for dinner, but the scandal had filled the two upper rooms and the bar lounge with gawkers. Ah, sweet justice. I nail Gina's scheme to the floor, land the mortgage dough, get Jay Porter's undying gratitude and then some, and produce a land office business, despite a mere blizzard.

"It is a classic," Tall Tommy Tanuka is saying with pride as he slurps a bowl of billi-bi. "Truly a beauty scam, Chick. Only one thing bothers me."

"Like what, Tall Tommy?"

"When she balked at going to the Plaza."

"You could look at it in one of two ways. Either she was suddenly hip to our act, or, even if she considered me legit, she saw that all the publicity would zonk the criminal conversation charge."

"Maybe," Tall Tommy said skeptically, "but I'd like it cleaner, clearer, you know."

I was about to ask him what the hell he meant by that when Sam, the station captain, brought a phone to the table and plugged in the jack. "Mr. Pemberton for you," he said.

I didn't even get past "hello" before he opened up with the panic. "Chick, I have had a wire from Lisa Banks telling me that this Velker fellow is hinting about going to the papers if a settlement can't be reached."

"Take it easy, Jay Porter. Haven't you seen the morning editions?"

"No, I'm calling from Little Neck. We're snowed in with several houseguests. Getting snowed in is becoming a habit. What's in them?"

I told him, and he said, "Yes, that is decisive, as far as a court case goes. But he can still smear me in the press."

"Well, first, Jay Porter, Velker isn't smart enough for blackmail and his wife may have had the wind taken out of her sails. Why don't we give it a few days and I'll negotiate a deal with the lady?"

"I hope you can, Chick. I'm getting a bit desperate."

I hung up, and Joey, one of the busboys, came to retrieve the phone. He bent down close to my ear and whispered, "Ling says some cops are looking for you up front. Maybe you want to duck out through the kitchen, boss."

"Don't sweat it, Joey." I had half expected some heat over the gambling raid and Ted Summers' slick moves that got

me released. Cops on the public morals squad don't like slick moves. They like to follow them up with an hour or two at Police Plaza where I'd get my hands slapped, a court visit, and a fine.

I didn't know the two plain-clothes guys who finally worked their way down to Table 36, but they sure knew me.

"Kelly?" the ugly one grunted. "Mister Kelly."

"Can it," he said as he reached over the table and frisked me from the waist up. "On your feet." I did, and he completed the job from the waist down.

"What the hell is going on?" The less ugly one took out his handcuffs. "Okay, already, I'll come quietly. Hell, it's only a gambling charge, fellas."

"Turn around, Kelly," the ugly one said, and when I did, I was cuffed. "I don't know from gambling charges, *Mister Kelly*." He turned me about, took out his celluloid Miranda card, and gave me a sardonic grin. "You're supposed to be a comic, Kelly. Here's a riddle for you. What's the sum of murder one plus murder one? It can't be murder two. Give up? It's a double life sentence. Okay, you have the right to remain silent..."

Four hours later, Lieutenant Donald Bullethead Jaffee of

Homicide was far from silent and getting hoarser by the minute. He seemed to have the persistent notion that I had poisoned Gina and Samson Velker with Jack Mac's aid and assistance. My kitchen manager had arrived at Police Plaza wearing city bracelets about the same time I did, and was probably going through the same Torquemada drill in some other office on some other floor. I hoped he was playing the same dummy act I was.

"Come on, Kelly," Jaffee said with false friendship. "She had something on you. Why else would a high roller like you be squiring a working class housewife around town? Kelly, we have the lab reports and the autopsy protocol, and they'll hang you. The poison was injected by hypodermic through the sealed champagne bottle cork. We can prove that beyond a doubt. Jack McCarthy's fingerprints are on the bottle's cardboard half-sleeve, and yours are on the fancy paper it was done up in. You wiped the bottle clean, and either forgot about the bottle's sleeve or didn't think it would show prints. We've come a long way with computer enhancement of latent prints, chump. Next time you plan a murder, don't be so sloppy. Remember, you're killing in the space age. That champagne is

an exclusive brand, a Chateau La Codar 1958, stored at your club by a customer, a Mr. Pemberton, Jay Porter Pemberton. Your own wine cellar records prove that.

"You poor bastard, you were caught in the middle. The wife is shaking you down and holding you as a trapped lover, and her old man is jealous as hell and wants to kill you. After that scene at your apartment house with the gun, you had no choice. You got them together for a supposed payoff and brought the wine to seal the deal. It's widely known that you only drink vodka and tonic, so you let Velker open the champagne and unsuspectingly pour his wife and himself a toast . . . a toast of freedom for you and death for them. What did she have on you, Kelly?"

On and on he went with his boring fairy tale, while I was trying to think the whole thing through.

Theory #1: Samson Velker killed his wife and then took a suicide sip, but that idea had two flaws. Why go through with the hypodermic jazz with a sealed cork, and if he was so hurt, why didn't he try to kill me?

But that scenario was more acceptable than Theory #2, which had Jay Porter in the starring role, taking matters

into his own hands. True, he keeps his Chateau La Codar at my place, but he must keep some at home, too. He was in a panic, called Gina direct, got her and Velker together for a payoff, and voilà! the poison toast bit. This also had a flaw, mainly that Samson Velker, by Mrs. Rosen's observation, was alive at two fifteen on my doorstep, and Gina was still breathing when I dropped her off around twelve forty-five. The M.E. fixed their deaths at between four and five A.M. and, due to the baby blizzard, no one, but no one, was able to get from Jay Porter's manse out at Little Neck, Long Island, to Gina's place on East 89th Street.

I might add that Mrs. Rosen must have gone off duty after the corridor fracas with my pathetic gunman because she told the cops she couldn't give me an alibi for four to five o'clock. Of course, for it to have been an ironclad alibi, she would have had to be in bed with me, but the least she could have done was to say she never saw me leave the apartment. Never have a non-fan for a neighbor.

I was still ignoring Jaffee and working on Theory #3 when a uniformed cop stuck his head into the office and said, "He's here." Jaffee cocked his bald noggin at me. "Your attorney

has finally arrived. We've documented that you were allowed to call him five minutes after you arrived."

Touchy, touchy. The uniform led me to a private room where I expected to find Ted Summers. Instead, who is perched on a chair with all the presence of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes? It is none other than Tall Tommy Tanuka, *ligner of ligners*.

"Thank you, officer, I'll buzz when we're through," he says as he waves me to a chair.

"What in the . . ."

Tall Tommy gives me a shush sign with fingers to lips as he places a briefcase on the table and takes out a small black oblong box. He flips a few switches and turns a dial as he looks innocently up at the ceiling. As a look of satisfaction crossed his face, I said, "You practice in downtown Moscow, counselor?"

"Better be safe than sorry, Chick. That's a cardinal rule by me. I'm here because your legal eagle is in Albany or some other place up in Canada, so I decide to jump in with an assist. 'Ja really kill 'em?"

"No, 'ju?"

"Hey, Chick, serious up. This is a twenty-to-life we're talking. If you didn't knock them off, we have to find out who did. Okay? Okay! Ever read a detective story?"

"There are times, Tall Tommy, when I believe I'm living in one."

"Then you know that one of the sure-fire ways to catch the culprit is to detect a flaw . . . a lie . . . in his alibi."

"Sure, Tommy," my mouth is saying, but my mind is wondering when in hell Summers is coming back from Albany. "Tommy, I appreciate your help, but, man, I need a lawyer, not a liar."

"What's the dif? Come on, Chick, all the details."

All things considered, sitting there talking with Tommy was more pleasant than going back to Jaffee's harangue, so I humored him with all the details from the supermarket spill to 21 and on until the gaming bust.

"The gee's wife, this Byerle, maybe has something going with the boat jockey?" he asked when I reported the overheard "suppose Jay Porter finds out" bit between Tierney and Byerle when they were going up to the Bottle Room.

"Maybe, but that's got nothing to do with the Velker deaths." Even as I said it, my mind must have put a checkmark next to the thought, because it surfaced again within the next forty-eight hours. Meanwhile, Tall Tommy is up on the ankles, as he put it.

"Sit tight and hang tough, Chick. I'm on a quest."

"What's the quest?"

"The truth about the matter at hand."

"Tommy, you're a lie expert, remember?"

"Takes one to know one," he says, and he's off.

Like I said, forty-eight hours later, a thought popped out of my memory bank and took on interesting dimensions. It had zoomed through my head while I was talking to Ted Summers, who had finally gotten Albany back into the union and had time for my problem. I had been in the Tombs prison for two days, having been sent there because a judge felt I was a poor bail risk. By the way, I can tell you this: one does not need electronic devices to keep one's conversation private in the visitation pens. In fact, the only device you need is a hearing aid to overcome the din in that zoo of babble.

"You realize, Chick," Ted was saying—shouting, "that it's a pretty thin argument, and I don't think the D.A. will buck Jay Porter Pemberton just to satisfy the questions you're raising. Hell, I'm ninety percent convinced we can go to trial and beat this thing. All the state has is circumstantial crap, and the D.A. knows it's full of

holes. But we can make a strong emotional case for a husband who was a loser and a psycho, committing murder and suicide in a jealous rage. You get a little dirt on you, but . . ."

"How much did he offer you, Ted?"

"Ten thou. Fifty more if you'll go along."

"Doesn't that tell you something? Jay Porter is scared, my friend."

"Of course he is. He has a reputation to protect."

"And the old bum of the month here doesn't."

"It's not the same, and you know it. The public expects a touch of scandal from showbiz types. Besides, if you introduce the stuff about your scam to neutralize the criminal conversation action, you'll look like a real bum, the bum of the century, never mind the month. The papers would tear you apart and you might just put yourself in jeopardy of a conspiracy charge."

"What are you trying to do, Ted, scare me?"

"If Velker couldn't with a gun, how can I with logic? If you want me to bring the Pembertons into this, Chick, I'll do it, but at least let me do it my way. Or rather, the diplomatic way, so you have a bridge to retreat over just in case you're wrong." Ted leaned closer to the divider

screen between us. "Chick, just tell me why you won't take the easy way out. You're losing your mortgage, the sixty G's, and the backing of a very powerful man. Irish pride?"

"No, it's because of something Tanuka asked me several days ago, about Gina Velker's shying away from the Plaza setup. I think I have the answer now."

"So be mysterious," Ted was getting to his feet, "and remember, I promise nothing regarding the D.A.'s reaction to your proposal."

I had to yell over the din, "We can but try," to which a woman visiting a prisoner in the stall next to mine responded, "Amen, brother, a-men!"

That "amen" was the only response I got over the next three days. No D.A. response, no Ted Summers response. Jack Mac and I played every two-handed card game known to man during "in cell" hours and every horse race in America in "out cell" time. One thing you can do at the Tombs is use the pay phones to make bets and, for the first time in years, I was ahead on the ponies, so prison has its mind-sharpening aspects. Finally, on a dismal, cold morning, a screw (see how I've warped) rattles our cage and tells me, "Ya goin' ta Leonard."

"S'bout time," says this hardened case.

After a short ride, I found Ted waiting for me on the main floor at the 155 Leonard Street building where the Manhattan D.A. hangs his hat.

"What in the hell is this about?" Summers asks the two delivery guards. He was agitated because my escort had me in hand and ankle manacles complete with lead chain. I looked like Houdini about to jump into a river.

"He's a murder one, max security," the guard on my left informed Ted, the elevator starter, and sundry loiterers in the lobby. I recommend this kind of announcement to anyone who wants an elevator to himself because, as we approached a waiting car, its passengers decided to get out and wait for a safer ride.

The manacles didn't come off until we were in a small waiting room somewhere on an upper floor. The guards left and Ted filled me in.

"It wasn't easy, Chick. The D.A. is leery, but he knows that, if you're right, he has a job to do, embarrassing as it might be. He's playing it cosy just the same. He won't be here. A young A.D.A. named Ruker will run the show. Mrs. Pemberton and the boat racer, Tierney, think they're here because

they met you at 21 the day you were there with Gina Velker. Jay Porter raised hell and his lawyer doubled it, but the D.A. stood firm, so the lawyer and Jay Porter decided to be here, too."

"Jay Porter sniffs a rodent, no doubt."

"And it isn't Mickey Mouse, my friend. However, the fact that Dunn from *Sports Illustrated* is here bolsters the supposed focus on the 21 meeting, so they might be off center."

"How about the Rhode Island lawyer, Procutto?"

"He's coming down by plane this morning with Tommy Tanuka."

"Tall Tommy! What's he doing in this?"

"Like everybody else, he wanted to help, so I put him to work. He's a very intelligent man and I felt Procutto would be more cooperative if we approached him on a personal basis. Tanuka's been up there for two days, so I guess it took a lot of convincing."

"How about the surprise guy?"

"He's here. You'll see him in the hall as we go into the hearing room. He's not in uniform, but you'll recognize the weatherbeaten face."

"That's the cast of characters, then."

"Except for Jaffee from Homicide . . . best described as the

wounded bull. He tried to talk the D.A. out of the setup, and hasn't knocked himself out with cooperation. That's it, Chick, my boy. Now, as they say, 'break a leg.'

Man, I've worked some tough audiences, but this crowd was grim. The minute I entered the room, a whitehaired guy was on his feet saying, "Mr. Ruker, we were not told that this man would be present."

The ink on Ruker's law degree might still be damp, but he was no slouch at *confrere* counterpunching. "Mr. Dinsmore, let me make it clear at the outset that this is not, repeat, *not*, a forum. It was explained to you all that you were here by invitation, and invitations can be refused. You all accepted yours, and clearly, Mr. Kelly accepted his."

"Mr. Ruker," Dinsmore, obviously Jay Porter's attorney, was about to play the Grand Old Man of Law to this kid behind the desk. "It was *my* understanding that Mrs. Pemberton and Mr. Tierney were called—sorry, invited—to substantiate that Mr. Kelly was at the 21 Club at a given time. It seems the district attorney's office has abandoned more efficient means of fact-finding such as the affidavit."

Nice try, but he still hadn't

fazed this kid *juris doctor*. "Mr. Dinsmore, we can spend the entire day in colloquy or we can clear this up . . ."

"There, you see," Dinsmore interrupted, "you use the term 'clear' . . ."

"Oh, for God's sake, Charlie," Byerle snapped, "let's get on with it."

"Yes, Charles," Jay Porter agreed, "let's hear what he has to say."

Dinsmore sat down, making no attempt to hide his irritation.

"Now, Mrs. Pemberton," Ruker said, "tell us of your meeting with Mr. Kelly at 21."

"I wouldn't say it was a *meeting*. I merely said hello in passing."

"Just hello?"

"We discussed his ankle briefly. He walked with the aid of a cane."

"How long were you in the restaurant before Mr. Kelly approached you?"

"A few seconds or so."

"The person at the reservations desk remembers it as a much longer period, long enough for you to make a phone call."

"Oh yes, I was calling Mr. Tierney to find out why he wasn't there, and got no answer. He arrived shortly after."

"During the time you entered 21 and prior to making the phone call, did you notice Mr.

Kelly and his companion at Table 3?"

"I am not in the habit of rubbernecking, Mr. Ruker."

"I didn't mean to imply that you were, madam, but since Table 3 is in direct line of sight with the reservations desk, you could hardly miss recognizing a familiar face. In fact, I am given to understand that many celebrities like that table for its high visibility."

"I am not familiar with the tribal beliefs of celebrities, Mr. Ruker. If all these questions are to establish that Mr. Kelly was with the woman who was killed, I am of no help to you at all. The first time I noticed him was when he came up to me. I don't know if that helps or hurts his case, but it is the truth."

"You can include me in that, too," Buzz Tierney chimed in. "Kelly was with By . . . Mrs. Pemberton when I came into the lobby, so I couldn't know where he was sitting."

"If that's why you got me down here," it was Phil Dunn the sportswriter's turn, "I arrived late and was taken immediately upstairs to the Bottle Room."

"Well, that seems to settle that," Dinsmore said with a sigh of relief. "I can appreciate the district attorney's office wanting to be thorough, but

since we can be of no assistance . . ."

"Mrs. Pemberton," Ruker played right through the exit speech, "when you were going upstairs, you said to Mr. Tierney, 'You promised it would work,' and then you added, 'Suppose Jay Porter finds out.'"

They couldn't help it. Byerle and Buzz exchanged furtive glances, which we all caught, no one more acutely than Jay Porter.

"I don't remember making any such statement," Byerle said gamely.

Ruker gave her a sharp jab to set her up for a one-two combination. "Others do remember, and will swear to it. Your statement was remembered verbatim. So what was it that your husband wasn't supposed to know, or find out?"

"Don't answer that, Byerle," Dinsmore was on his feet and angry as hell. "And I want you to listen to me, Jay Porter and Buzz Tierney as well. It's preposterous, but there's the thread of an implication here that Mrs. Pemberton is somehow involved in the death of Gina Velker. All this jabberwocky about being invited here for a chat about meeting Kelly was a ruse, and believe you me, Mr. Ruker, the D.A. will rue this

action, if indeed it had his sanction at all."

I wasn't listening to Dinsmore's harangue. I was looking at Jay Porter's face. He stared fixedly at the wall behind Rucker's desk, and I could sense the thought pattern emerging from his brain the same way it had in mine, which went like this:

Tierney and Byerle would like to make permanent whoopee, and *they* concoct the criminal conversation plot. Byerle would then have grounds for a beautiful divorce settlement plus a cut of Gina's take. Poor Jay Porter's brain was putting together the pieces, and his ever-tightening mouth showed he didn't like it.

Byerle had known he was going to Newport the evening of the storm. She knew he was too much the gentleman to turn Gina out. His own weekend conversations with Gina had told him she wasn't smart enough to dream up the caper, but Byerle and Buzz were. Oh yes, I thought, you're getting the message, Mr. Millionaire.

"You promised me it would work," she had said, and when she saw Gina with me, a pal of her husband, she knew it was trouble. Then, when it started to fall apart, the publicity had turned Gina into a romantic rebel and Gina's husband into

bitterness and vengeance, both too dangerous to be alive.

While I'm watching Jay Porter, Ruker had somehow quieted Dinsmore down with a lot of legal mumbo-jumbo and the attorney was saying, "Of course we will answer any question that's germane to the case. Ask if you've got one."

"Mr. Pemberton, you keep a supply of a champagne labeled 'Chateau La Codar 1958' stored at Mr. Kelly's nightclub."

"Yes, I do. It's a private label bottled for me exclusively at my place in France."

"Is your entire stock kept at Mr. Kelly's?"

"Oh no, I keep some at 21, a few down at Burning Tree, and of course, a case or so at our various *pieds-à-terre*."

"Which do you consider your residence of record, sir?"

"Legally, I suppose it's split between the apartment on Fifth Avenue and the house in Little Neck on the Island. Summers, of course, at Newport, and sometimes the Palm Beach place in winter."

"And you keep La Codar at all these homes?"

"Yes, I don't drink much, but when I do, it's always La Codar so I like to have it available. Oh yes, if it's pertinent, there are always a few bottles on my jet."

"Thank you, sir. And are these

bottles numbered sequentially?"

"No. There's no need. I don't inventory it, although Mike at 21 keeps meticulous records, as does Jack McCarthy at Chick Kelly's."

"You understand, Mr. Pemberton," Ruker said, "that a bottle of La Codar carried the poison that killed the Velkers?"

"So I am told. I guess that's why Mr. Kelly is suspect. Something about fingerprints?"

"Yes, that's correct. On the bottle's cardboard sleeve and the wrapping paper, but not on the bottle itself. On the night of the Velker deaths, you were having a Sea Dart party, as I understand it. Is it possible that one of your guests could have taken a bottle of La Codar with him when he left?"

"I should say quite impossible, Mr. Ruker, because no one left. If you recall, that was the night of the second blizzard, and nothing was moving on Long Island. We simply put everyone up for the night: Mr. Tierney, the boat crew, and a few fellows from the press, like Mr. Dunn here."

"You know, Mr. Ruker," Dinsmore was at it again, "it seems to me that, as a prosecutor, your approach is a bit confused. Mr. Kelly is in custody because of his liaison with the deceased woman, and a bot-

tle of poisoned champagne taken from his own cellar is the vessel of death. Why, then, are we dwelling on a party of people who had no connection with the case, and who, even if they had, could not possibly have gotten to the scene of the crime unless they had wings? I believe that even the gulls were walking that night."

Well, folks, there you have it, and if you missed the essential element that's going to hang Lady Byerle and Buzz Tierney, it will be clear when you hear what my surprise guy waiting outside has to say. Oh, why make you wait. The surprise guy is Lieutenant Commander Paul Dirinkus of the U.S. Coast Guard, and he is prepared to show on a map that, on the night of the Velker deaths, you *could* get a bottle of poisoned Chateau La Codar from Little Neck, Long Island, on Long Island Sound to 89th Street on the East River by the smoothest, fastest means on earth, a hydroplane. His map shows that the East River is actually a tidal basin for Long Island Sound, on which Little Neck is located.

So, as they say in the detective stories, Tierney had the means, a spare bottle of exclusive champagne, which he or Byerle poisoned; motive, mil-

lions in a divorce settlement; and opportunity, a lightning-speed boat piloted by a pro. He docks the Sea Dart at the foot of 89th Street, and goes to the meeting with the Velkers, and gets them to drink the wine he brought with him. Then, to his surprise, he finds my bottle unopened. Byerle probably told him her husband kept Codar '58 at my joint, so he's got one beauty way to hang it on me. Wearing gloves, he just switches the cardboard sleeve, leaves my wrapping paper behind, and takes the unopened bottle with him, either dumping it on the return trip to Little Neck or putting it into the manse's cellar stock.

Great plan, Byerle! Slick work, Tierney! Too bad you had to bump into Chick Kelly. Rucker was preparing for the *coup de grace* and I was savoring it.

"I know it's a touchy subject, Mr. Dinsmore, but I would still like to know from Mrs. Pemberton what she meant when she said, 'You said it would work. . . . Suppose Jay Porter finds out.' I believe Mr. Summers is prepared to ask her under oath in an open courtroom unless we can find out here and now."

"For God's sake, Buzz," Phil Dunn said, shaking his head, "why don't you put Mr. Pemberton out of his misery. It will

be public knowledge when next week's edition comes out. I went down to the Sea Dart hangar at Little Neck that night of the blizzard and saw for myself."

Ah, glory. Ah, sweet corroboration. An eyewitness to Tierney's death mission departure. 'Tis the luck of the Kellys.

"What is going to be public knowledge?" Jay Porter is incensed. "Buzz, what is this man talking about?"

Buzz looked for help from Byerle and got none. Then he looked at Dunn, and got more than he asked for.

"Mr. Pemberton," Dunn said, "the big secret these two have kept from the hydroplane racing world is that the Sea Dart, into which you have poured a fortune, is a lemon."

"That's a lie," Byerle screeched. "Daddy's designs will work if we can get the engineering right . . ."

"Mrs. Pemberton, no one had more respect for Skip Dorlan as a racer than I did," Dunn said sincerely, "but as a designer, he was out of his depth. Hell, Buzz, your uncle was killed in a death trap of his own design, and here you two cousins are trying to make a shrine out of a concept that doesn't, and never can, work."

"After the party broke up that night, I went down to the Sea Dart hangar and tried to

turn the motors over. You've been taking the boat to all the races and then bowing out with breakdown excuses when all the time the dumb thing doesn't work."

Byerle started to sob and her husband went to comfort her. Inside, I am also sobbing, and not a comforting hand in sight. What is this? *Cousins!* Well, goodbye, love affair, and my motive theory. A boat that doesn't work! Goodbye, opportunity. Now, if I only had a bottle of the means, I could take a slug and be out of my misery. Ted was squirming in his seat, saying nothing.

From the look I'm getting from Ruker, I can see it's manacle time again, but suddenly there is a commotion at the door and who is it but Tall Tommy. He is accompanied by a dapper dude with a bandit mustache and another guy in a kind of Forest Ranger outfit. Attached to the ranger is a chunky, dark-haired girl who obviously doesn't like handcuffs any more than I did.

Ted was on his feet and so was Ruker, who said, "What's the meaning of all this?" and Ted is saying, "Attorney Procutto?" and Dinsmore is saying, "What kind of a circus is going on here?"

The dapper one responded to

Ted. "Yes, Blaise Procutto, attorney-at-law, with offices in Providence, Rhode Island. Are you Attorney Summers?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid you've made a trip for nothing. You see . . . oh, this is Assistant District Attorney Ruker."

"How are you, Ruker," Procutto said, shaking his hand. "Did some D.A. time myself once. Well, there she is, and here's the confession, and I wish they had had detectives on the Providence force as sharp as Sergeant Thomas Tanuka when I was with the prosecutor's staff. This fella not only wraps it up, he practically writes your summation to the jury for you."

"Sergeant Tanuka?" Jaffee moves menacingly toward Tall Tommy. "Sergeant of what?"

Meanwhile, Ruker, who had been reading the document that Procutto had handed him, looks up and says, "Later, Lieutenant Jaffee. Attorney Procutto, this is a very detailed statement Miss Banks has made."

"And all of it checks out. This trooper is Lieutenant Matti of the Rhode Island State Police, who worked with Sergeant Tanuka on the investigation. I was instrumental in getting both law agencies together since my offices were used by Miss Banks in her scheme. I'm only sorry that I failed to see through

her plot to bilk Mr. Pemberton."

"Lisa?" Jay Porter said to the woman. For the first time since she entered the room, she raised her head. When she did, we could see how her black eyes crackled with emotion.

"What do you think you ever did for me, you wealthy pig? Pay for the care of a fine man crippled by the bad boat handling of your stupid wife. Guilt money, that's what it was. All you goddamn Newport rich men are the same. So you cripple some poor handyman: toss him a bone. Send his daughter to secretarial school so she can support his pain-wracked body. That's not even charity, it's an insult. When he is dying, the doctors say he has no spirit to live. *She* took that spirit," her finger pointed to Byerle, "because she is reckless with a boat, and I decided to pay you back for my father after his death. He made me swear revenge. I would have had it, too, if that fool Gina hadn't lost her head to high society."

It was almost ten o'clock before Ruker was through with me, Jack Mac, Ted, and Tall Tommy. He went over the Banks confession point by point, with Tommy filling in his end of it. "The one thing that bugged me all along was that this Gina

dame supposedly had the smarts enough to dream up a big-time complicated con, and then kisses it off for Chick. No offense, *amigo*, but a crafty mind does not work in such a manner. So I figure she's a dupe, but whose dupe? The mark's wife? How does she find this dupe, then, want ads? No, there has got to be some connection on the same social level. On my first visit to Procutto's office, I'm struck by this savvy little secretary who hipped the mark to the con in the first place. Not being without charm, I take her to dinner and find out she went to business school in Boston. Chick had mentioned that Gina was a secretarial school dropout, so I hustle to Boston and find a Gina Tobin who was a classmate of Lisa Banks, and one of the teachers I.D.'s the Gina Velker in a news photo as Gina Tobin.

"With this connection, I am on my way. Banks is a local girl and she keeps close tabs on the caretaker at the mark's house in Newport. She learns the gee is coming up for an inspection. I figure a quick call to New York, a fast shuttle flight and a waiting car, and you have Gina coming in from the snow. The Rhode Island state cops checked the car out. It was rented on Lisa Banks's credit card in Boston. So Chick's hus-

tle turns the dupe's head, and she calls Banks and wants out and threatens to blow the whistle to Pemberton. It's murder time! Banks could have gotten the bottle of champagne from the Newport house or maybe her old man stole it, but she knew it was exclusively Porter's so she does the poison injection trick. I'll bet she nearly died herself when she found another bottle of Codar '58 unopened as she was cleaning things up after killing the Velkers. That's where her lack of social class comes in. What's a small town secretary know about private stock being kept at restaurants? She must have thought it was given to Gina when she was snowed in.

"Her original plan had been to wipe the poisoned bottle clean of her prints and leave it behind, hoping to implicate Pemberton when the cops traced the private label back to him. Now she thinks she's in clover with a set of his prints on another bottle."

"So why did she just switch the sleeves instead of opening the new bottle, emptying it, and pouring in the remainder of the poisoned wine?"

"But she did change the bottles, Chick!"

"The hell you say, Tall Tommy. There were *no* prints on the bottle the cops found."

Tall Tommy grins me a cat's whisker-licking grin. "And what does a good wine steward do when he takes a bottle out of storage for presentation?"

I looked over at Jack Mac. "You wiped the bottle clean?"

"Just to get rid of the dust, Chick," he said sheepishly. Now he tells me!

"And being so neat, you only held it by the sleeve while wrapping it. So the bottle and sleeve found by the cops were from my cellar, and Lisa took the original with her . . ."

"Leaving the hypo-injected cork behind her, of course, to make it complete."

"How did you figure it out, Tall Tommy?"

"You just have to understand a liar's mentality, Chick."

It was a few days later—the day the mortgage payment was due—when I sat in the bar lounge waiting for Jay Porter to return any of my many phone calls.

"He won't call," Barry grumped.

"Why not? I kept my end of the deal."

"The hell you did. You tried to pin a murder rap on his wife and her cousin. You're some genius."

"Before Ruker could get to mention the criminal conversation scheme, Dunn blew up

all the evidence with the damn boat being a lemon. It was Tall Tommy bringing in the confession that opened up the fact that Gina spent a weekend with Jay Porter."

"Which Mrs. P. couldn't blame him for. It was a scheme. He won't call because he smelled a rat."

A voice says to Cuz, "Metaxa and beer," and I turn to Tall Tommy climbing onto the stool next to mine.

"Hello, *Sergeant Tanuka*," I said.

"You know, this Jaffee character is still making noise over that. I am on a mission, Chick." He places an envelope on the bar. "It was no easy task, but I got ten iron men for you out of J. P. Pemberton. Five for your mortgage, five for your trouble. Also, stop calling him, he does not like you henceforth."

"La-dee-dah. What did he lay

on you for all that detective work, sarge?"

"You are looking at an executive of Pemberton Enterprises."

"Security."

"Hell, no. I'm director of public relations."

"It figures, for a *ligner of ligners*," moans Barry.

"So I'm really on the list, huh?"

"I'd give it a double yes, Chick. Well, I've got to be on the amble, friends. The public needs relating. By the way, Chick, did you figure out why I was bothered about Gina's not spending the weekend at the Plaza? If she had, by the way, she might still be alive."

"Yeah, I figured maybe she didn't want to cheapen our relationship with a quick shack-up. Sort of old fashioned morality, Tall Tommy, but to tell you the truth, it might have been a lie."

"See, Chick, you're learning all the time." He ankled.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper



Illustration by Patricia Olstad

Since Tony Hillerman's series were profiled in the October, 1985, column of this magazine, he has brought his two detectives together in *Skinwalkers* (Harper & Row, 1986), the Edgar nominee *A Thief of Time* (Harper & Row, 1988), and now in his latest **Talking God** (Harper & Row, \$17.95, 239 pp). But in *Talking God* he has done more than that—he has removed his two Navajo policemen from the reservation and plunked them down in Washington, D.C., where they have to deal not only with an unfamiliar culture but also with broader Indian issues than those normally encountered among the Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni they police. This new environment tells us even more about Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee, and brings them closer than ever to their heritage. A good read for Hillerman fans.

Perhaps it is Hillerman's successes, or maybe Native American policeman are just popular these days. At any rate, there are several more AmerInd police on the scene today. Richard Martin Stern's series, begun in 1971 and then put on hold, is now being picked up again. Out so far are the reissued **Murder in the Walls** (Pocket, \$3.50, 237 pp) and **You Don't Need an Enemy** (Pocket, \$3.50, 222 pp), which introduced us in 1971 to Juan Felipe "Johnny" Ortiz, homicide lieutenant in Santo Cristo, New Mexico, and the new **Tangled Murders** (Pocket, \$3.50, 256 pp), which brings

Johnny and his compadres into the eighties. Also promised are the reissue of **Death in the Snow** and a new Ortiz mystery, **The Missing Man**. Johnny is a half-breed Apache, and though he was raised by his Apache mother, he is less "Indian" than Hillerman's Navajos. The New Mexico setting, however, is almost as inspired as Hillerman's Navajo Country, and the plots are sufficiently complicated to make them interesting reading.

A book more in the Hillerman vein is Scott Young's **Murder in a Cold Climate** (Viking, \$16.95, 240 pp). Young's detective is a RCMP inspector, Matthew "Matteesie" Kitologitak, a full-blooded Inuk (translate that as Eskimo) who is married to a white woman living in Ontario and has a Meti (half-breed Indian) lover in the Northwest Territories. Matteesie is asked to investigate a missing airplane and, subsequently, the murder of an Indian rights advocate. The reader not only gets a good mystery but also a feel for Native American relations (Eskimo, Indian, and half-breed do not trust each other) and the far Canadian north. Matteesie is a very likable character, concerned with keeping in touch with his Eskimo roots (like Chee throughout Hillerman's books), and I hope there's a series forthcoming starring this Mountie.

Finally, also in the Hillerman vein, and just released, is **The Grandfather Medicine** by Jean Hager (St. Martin's, \$16.95, 244 pp). Hager's hero is a half-breed Cherokee who was "raised white" in Oklahoma City. He is now chief of police in Buckskin, Oklahoma, a town with a large number of full-blood Cherokees who subscribe to the old ways. Chief Mitchell Bushyhead's white wife has recently died (as has Leaphorn's in *Talking God*, and he is still depressed when he is called on to investigate the murder of a full-blood artist. Since he knows little of his Cherokee heritage, he relies on his deputy, Victor Rabbit, and on a seventy-two-year-old medicine man, Crying Wolf, to decipher the clues to the murder. Cherokee incantations and legends are used throughout the book, providing a good "Indian" feel to the story, and at the conclusion of the case, Mitchell is intrigued by his heritage. Perhaps there will be sequels in which he investigates it further?

Mickey Friedman, for the first time, repeats a heroine—Georgia Lee Maxwell who starred in *Magic Mirror* and now detects in **A Temporary Ghost** (Viking \$16.95, 215 pp). Georgia Lee is in France, ghost-writing a book for and about Vivien Howard, who is accused of, but not charged with, killing her husband. On the accused's estate in Provence, Georgia begins getting threatening letters, and finds she is suspected of detecting even before she

considers it. The death of the mysterious assistant clinches it, and Georgia Lee is off and running, literally. A must for Friedman fans.

If you like historical novels, the exploits of Marcus Didius Falco, a "public informer" in the Rome of Vespasian, are for you. Falco debuts in Lindsey Davis's **Silver Pigs** (Crown, \$18.95, 288 pp) when he rescues the adopted daughter of a well-to-do merchant and the niece of a senator. This rescue leads to the discovery of a theft of silver from the Roman mines in Britain, and Falco goes undercover as a slave in the silver mines to discover the culprit. Great atmosphere and an intriguing set of characters.

Occurring at the death of Jesus of Nazareth, **The Man Who Buried Jesus** by John Evangelist Walsh (Collier Books, \$7.95, 153 pp) tells the tale of Nicodemus, a man who helped bury Christ. Nicodemus was a private citizen, a member of the Sanhedrin, and a follower of the living Jesus. He doubts the new legend springing up around the man, however, and sets himself the task of proving that Jesus did not rise from the dead but, rather, was stolen so that his followers could claim His divinity. The ending is obvious from the beginning, but the tale of detection in biblical Israel is intriguing.

A contemporary religious cult is the focus of **The Four Last Things** by Timothy Hallinan (NAL, \$16.95, 318 pp). Investigating the murder of a member of a New Age cult led by a child channel named Angel, a sleazy lawyer, and a suspicious doctor, Simeon Grist abandons the search for his landlady's missing cat. Although slow to start, the book picks up near the end, and Grist, his girlfriend reporter Eleanor Chang, and his new assistant, animal-control officer Dexter Smif, are charming. Some scenes are violent and a bit graphic for the sensitive reader.

Barbara Vine scores again with **The House of Stairs** (Harmony, \$18.95, 277 pp). We know that there has been a murder, or at least a suspicious death, in the past, and that Elizabeth, a writer who may also have Huntington's Chorea, Bell, and Cosette are involved somehow. This book is atmosphere from start to end, with the narrator, Elizabeth Vetch, telling in flashback the story of her life and that of her adopted "aunt" Cosette, while she searches for Bell. Elizabeth is like a person with a missing filling, probing the cavity with her tongue. The search for Bell is painful, like the suspense she is under, waiting to see if she really has the disease, but she cannot stop worrying at either one.

A similar tale, albeit shorter and more Midwest-American, is

Susan Taylor Chehak's **The Story of Annie D.** (Houghton Mifflin, \$17.95, 206 pp). Annie tells the tale of her life in essay form, and in the essays we learn of her childhood in Nebraska, her marriage, her sons, and the misspent life of her best friend, Phoebe. Annie begins her tale when Phoebe dies in a car accident, perhaps a suicide. Assault, rape, and murder have occurred in the past and Annie knows who committed these crimes; she solves them in her own unusual way. The suspense is in following her thoughts through the solution to these past crimes.

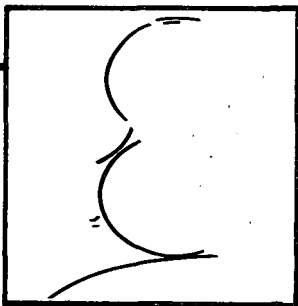
If you have ever had a manuscript rejected, or severely and unkindly criticized, then Bob Fenster's **The Last Page** (Perseverance Press, \$8.95, 179 pp) is for you. A story full of black humor unfolds as someone kills senior mystery editors in the major publishing houses, pinning the ultimate rejection slip to the bodies as the primary clue. Of course the police brass do not recognize this as a clue, so Homicide Detective Brian Skiles teams up with mystery editor Anne Baker to trap the killer and show up his idiotic but ambitious superiors.

More idiotic and ambitious superiors, this time in the form of a charismatic D.A. and his assistants, inhabit **The Immediate Prospect of Being Hanged** by Walter Walker (Viking, \$17.95, 302 pp). A member of the leading family of exclusive Woodedge, Massachusetts, is killed and her husband, a ne'er-do-well golf pro, is the prime suspect. The D.A. wants to pin this one on the husband so he can be shown as not being partial to the rich. But his investigator, Patt Starbuck, who also has a bone or two to pick with the good people of Woodedge, goes off on his own, to solve the murder (sort of) and his own past mystery (maybe). While the ending is a little less than satisfying, the story is a good one, and the character of Starbuck is both engaging and a little sinister.

Sam Llewellyn, in **Blood Orange** (Summit Books, \$17.95, 255 pp), has given us a second installment in his sailing series. *Blood Orange* stars James Dixon, proud owner of *Secret Weapon*, a catamaran he hopes to race in the ocean events of the big season ahead. James's problems include a lot of debts from the fitting of the boat, a daughter who should be getting more of his time than he has been able to spare, a business with a less-than-appealing partner, and an apparent insurance scam that starts with the sabotaging of contenders and culminates in murder. The plot is interesting; the appeal to me, however, is the character of Dixon who is, as the publisher claims, in the mold of a Dick Francis hero: a loner who is dedicated to his sport and who will let no one intimidate him. The nautical details can be overwhelming, though.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



Although *Sea of Love* takes its name from a hit song of the 1950's, it is firmly rooted in the 1980's. In this urban crime drama, the common thread found in a string of murders is the personals column of a weekly magazine.

Detective Frank Keller (Al Pacino) seems the type of guy singles columns are made for. He's divorced—his ex-wife married another cop. He spends his nights after work holed up in his apartment, drinking, with only the television set for company. When he's in the mood for a little chitchat, he heads to a local watering hole where he downs a couple of glasses.

After twenty years on the force, Keller can finally retire and take home a pension of half his salary. But, as he tells those who urge him to hang up the holster, "Retire to what?"

The job is his life. It's all he's got... at least it is until he

meets Helen (Ellen Barkin), a blonde-maned woman in red leather, tight jeans, and a come-hither smile. Unfortunately, she is also a suspect in a murder case—one he has been assigned to solve.

Comparing notes, Keller and his new partner, Detective Sherman Touhey (John Goodman), discover the personal-ads link in their investigation. So, they reason, why not set a trap by placing the same distinctively poetic, introspective sounding ads the apparent killer fell for. Then they can reel in the respondents and check their prints with ones found at the scenes of the crimes.

Keller convinces a dubious lieutenant to fund the scheme with departmental money, although the supervisor is not very happy about paying for "dates" for his detectives. He warns them, "Converse, get prints, and split. I don't want

to read about this in the *Village Voice*."

What the veteran cop doesn't count on is falling for one of the women who reply to the phony ad. Helen isn't like the other women. When the two meet at a Manhattan eatery, they barely get past the "converse" part of the ruse. Apparently a veteran personals-answerer, she immediately takes a dislike to our charming undercover detective and splits without leaving a single fingerprint behind. His police instinct tells him she could be the one. His male instinct says the same thing.

Accidentally, the two bump into each other at an all-night Korean grocery—they live in the same neighborhood, one of those anonymous areas in a large city where, although you are surrounded by people, you can still be alone.

This time they go for a drink.



Al Pacino in *Sea of Love*

Against his usually stable police judgment and despite the warnings from his partner to "walk away," Keller takes this woman, this suspect, back to his apartment, where interrogation is the furthest thing from his mind.

As the investigation, and the relationship, continue, a hint is dropped here, a clue there, all adding up to another name for Helen—bad news. At the same time, although we do know some things about the lady in question—she manages a pricey midtown shoe shop, she's the mother of a young daughter, she's from a small town—she manages to maintain an air of mystery about her. In contrast, what you see of Detective Keller is what you get. Right from the start we find out all we need to know about him. This disparity keeps the tension between the two always tight.

John Goodman, better known as Roseanne Barr's TV husband, does a good job as Pacino's police partner here. In contrast to Pacino's dark, brooding Keller, his Touhey is a heavyset, bantering family man. Al Pacino gives a gritty performance in a role that keeps him on an emotional roller coaster, never knowing if his woman is a lover, a killer, or both. Ellen Barkin is quite provocative in *Sea of Love*, which, by the way, contains some nudity and foul language.

THE STORY THAT WON



© N. Jay Juffe

The August Mysterious Photograph contest was won by Virginia Thompson of Alameda, California. Honorable mentions go to Catherine Sweitzer of River Forest, Illinois; Jan Streilein of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; John Begany of Orlando, Florida; Jeanine Mills of Lincoln, Nebraska; Peter M. Winkler of Franklin, Pennsylvania; Morgan S. Thompson of Spring Valley, California; Christine Pearson Thiltgen of Stockton, California; Joan McIntyre of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Gerry Griffiths of San Jose, California; Sean Callahan of Dexter, Maine; Sandra Cable of Richmond, Texas; and Sidney Glaser of Milford, Connecticut.

HIS PROPER PLACE by Virginia Thompson

I can still picture every expression on his face in my kitchen—disdaining my desserts, critizing my cakes, scorning my soups and stews, ridiculing my roasts, and sneering at my souffles.

Then, in the dining room, the stiff, detached disapproval as he served dinners, my beautiful dinners, to Lord and Lady Edgemont.

One of us had to go.

So I killed him. I killed the butler. And I buried him. Out there. Out in the woods.

Under the Pan trees.

CLASSIFIED MARKET

AH-MID-DECEMBER/89

ALFRED HITCHCOCK—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word—payable in advance—(\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SML, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS it true . . . Jeeps For \$44 Through The Government? Call For Facts! 1-312-742-1142 Ext. 4674.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$5.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$3.25 (includes postage) to Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

MYSTERY Addicts!! Free Catalogue!! Good, Inexpensive, Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, Ohio 45232.

ANNOTATED lists of new mysteries. Also used mystery catalog. Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl, Boulder, CO 80302.

FOR Details of gripping hilarious gutsy Miller Thriller books write: 18 Goodwin Street, Narabeen 2101 Australia.

HOW to make big money at home. Book \$5.00. 3127 Del Rey Ave., Carlsbad, CA 92009.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

MYSTERY FICTION. Free Catalogue. Write: Magna Mysteries, P.O. Box 5732, Virginia Beach, VA 23455.

FOR the best in mysteries: books, tapes, videos, gifts and games, write: MYSTERIES BY MAIL CO., Post Office Box 679, Boonville, California 95415. Free 24 page catalog.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Daily! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-MDC, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

TAKE PICTURES for profit. Try our unique methods. Write: Camera Ventures, Box 771, Lamar, CO 81052.

VENDING MACHINES. No Selling. Routes earn amazing profits. 32-page Catalogue **FREE.** Parkway Corporation, 1930NO Greenspring Drive, Timonium, Maryland 21093.

BUMPERSTICKER PRINTER. Cheap, Simple, Portable. Free Details. Bumper, POB 22791(BC), Tampa, FL 33622.

PROFITABLE GOLD FOIL PRINTER. Personalize business cards, pencils, matches. Free details. Gold, P.O. Box 24986(BC), Tampa, FL 33623.

BIG PROFITS, SMALL INVESTMENT. Cash-in on the growing HOT demand for **PERSONALIZED COFFEE MUGS** for business & personal gifts. Our portable **MUG MACHINE** lets you put photos and artwork on high-profit ceramic mugs, quickly & easily. Call Ext. 440 at 800-334-0425 (in North Carolina, 800-331-4651).

READ BOOKS for pay! \$100 a title. Write: PASE-HZ6, 161 Lincolnway, North Aurora, IL 60542.

PLACE

CLASSIFIED

AH-MID-DECEMBER/89

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EARN Hundreds Weekly. Stuffing Envelopes. No Experience Necessary. Start Immediately. New Era Enterprises, M., 1589 Albion, Rexdale, Ontario M9V 1B6. Enclose a long Sase.

MAKE \$15,000 IN 30 DAYS! EASY! NO INVESTMENT! FREE DETAILS: FINANCIAL, BOX 1150-DP, FORT WASHINGTON, PA 19034.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts . . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49424.

CLOSEOUTS! Discounts! Below wholesale! Liquidations! Freebies! All kinds! Information (Stamp): DDN, 20152-D, Ferndale, Michigan 48220.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

"WRITE YOUR WAY TO A FORTUNE" - Turn your hobby, interest or idea into a gold mine! Free brochure. . . Saunders' Store, 123-A Bellevue Ave., Salem, VA 24153.

HIGH School at Home. No Classes. Diploma awarded. Low tuition. Send for brochure. Call any time. 1-800-228-5600 or write American School, Dept. 388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

LEARN Bookkeeping/Accounting. Home study. Over 80,000 Students trained SUCCESSFULLY. Free literature. 800-223-4542 Dept. AM102.

FINANCIAL

VISA/MASTERCARD. NO SAVINGS REQUIRED. Bad credit no problem. Limits to \$5,000.00. Personal and business loans. 1-904-221-7139.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 7058 Red Oak, IA 51591.

HELP WANTED

STAY home and earn money. Assembly work. Full or part time. Many opportunities available. Call today! (813) 576-7500 Ext. 975.

HOBBIES & COLLECTIONS

STAINED GLASS starter kit. Send for free details. Astrosoft, 15006 La Mesa Street, Sylmar, CA 91342.

JEWELRY

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-910 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

LOANS BY MAIL

MONEY PROBLEMS? Write us. Immediate Loans and Outright Grants to individuals refused elsewhere. 98% eligible! Associates-D2, C.S. 9008, Baldwin, NY 11510-9008.

BORROW \$60,000 "overnight." Any purpose! Keep indefinitely! Free Details! Write: Martin, Box 1593-NC, Safety Harbor, FL 34695.

HOT Money! Amazing new report lets you borrow bushels of cash with lousy credit. No collateral. ASC, Dept. 23, 1107 Crawford Road, Statesville, NC 28677.

SMALL Business Loans available. Call Loan Information Center (800) 727-0752 for immediate details.

UNSECURED LOANS!—Visa/Mastercards—Plus More! Fast, easy-proven method. Any amount, purpose. E-Z repay plan! Credit, no problem. Call: (714) 640-1044; MoneyExpress, 4521 Campus #286R, Irvine, CA 92715.

Classified Continued

AH-MID-DECEMBER/89

LOTTERIES & SWEEPSTAKES

"BIG-Money Sweepstakes" - How to enter and win!...\$1 + Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope. CP Company, 11 Rushmore Ct., Sumter, SC 29154.

MAILING LISTS

NEW NAMES! Only sold once! Computerized labels! Guaranteed deliverable! DCO: 1-800-992-9405 Visa/MC/AmEx.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes certificate worth \$5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send \$3.25 (postage included) to DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for \$500.00 weekly? Send six 25¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

GOOD MONEY! Daily! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

AVERAGE \$140/100 Stuffing envelopes. Free detail. "SASE:" Nguyen's Credit Service, 320 Woolsey Street, Dept. C-1, San Francisco, CA 94134.

"AMERICA'S Biggest Lie!" Believe It? NOT Believing It Can Make You Rich! Free Details From: Brady Hill & Assoc., 2681 Monroeville Blvd., Ste. 480, Monroeville, PA 15146.

HOW TO START YOUR OWN PROFITABLE BUSINESS. Free Details. Pikes Peak Publishing, 918 Tenderfoot Hill, Suite 204, Department 300, Colorado Springs, CO 80906.

HOME MAIL ORDER BOOK BUSINESS. Start Part-time. Free Report! Mascor, Dept. IM, Box 7367, Silver Spring, MD 20907.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

READ "AMERICAN FLEA MARKET JOURNAL" for those special wholesale supply sources, profit making ideas, inside info. Year subscription (4 issues), \$10.00. Sample copy, \$3.00. Write: M.H. Sparks, 1911 Avenue D, Brownwood, Texas 76801.

HUGE PROFITS! Learn VCR Cleaning and Repair. Award-winning Video and Training Manual reveals SECRETS! Prior Experience Unnecessary. Free info: Viejo Publications, 3540 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 310, Dept. IO2, L.A., CA 90010.

2000% PROFIT - SELL 120 ROLLS KODAK FILM 17¢ roll. Certificate Book costs 80¢ sells for \$20.00. Free Sample. Central Film, Box 428E, Grove City, CA 93433.

NOW! SUCCESSFULLY start your own profitable business! FREE INFORMATION! Wygonik Publications, A2601 Buchanan, Natrona Heights, PA 15065.

DISTRIBUTORS NEEDED. New series Financial Pamphlets for average people. \$5.00 for sample issue and information. Red Letter, Box 100831-P, SA, TX 78201.

NO-Nonsense Way To \$500 a Day. \$1 + Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope: Ruby Pickering, Box 4322, E. Providence, RI 02914.

LITTLE MONEY NEEDED to make big bucks. Start your own successful home businesses. FREE DETAILS. Evergreen Publishing, 1680 Rees Hill Rd., Salem, OR 97306.

"MAKE Your Fortune From 'Free' Government Publications." Send a SASE and \$1.00 to: Robert Bovey, 4505 Cedar Springs Road, Dallas, Texas 75219.

MURDER MYSTERY WEEKENDS

YOU will take an active part in solving a MURDER at specially selected resorts! Call now, Toll-Free: 800-K-I-L-L-E-R-S.

**YOU'LL MAKE
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—
BY READING and ANSWERING
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

Classified Continued

AM-MID-DECEMBER/89

OF INTEREST TO ALL

HANDWRITING ANALYSIS. Discover your uniqueness \$18 (2000+ word analysis). **BIO-RHYTHMS** Learn your high-low mental, physical, emotional cycles. One year \$12. Send birthdate. Both reports \$25. Ann Jacques, #155, 1268 Main St., Tewksbury, MA 01876.

WHAT HAPPENED On Your Birthdate? Headlines, News, Sports, Pop Music. Laminated To Last. \$3.00. Joe White, 3435 So. Orange, 104T, Orlando 32806.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American — Mexican — Philippine—European. Photo selection **FREE!** Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

BEAUTIFUL, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINAS want men of all ages as Life-partners. **VIDEOS AVAILABLE.** PAL, 51 BLANCA, CO 81123-0084.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton #1580, Denver, Colorado 80202.

SALESMEN-DISTRIBUTORS

AD SPECIALTY SALES OPENINGS. 80 Years in the Advertising Specialty and Calendar Industry have taught us the best Salespeople are Self-Starters who prefer the independence of straight commission sales over someone else calling the shots. **NEWTON MFG. CO.** offers that person the **BEST** Home Office Support in the industry! Ask around! Weekly Commissions, 24 Hour Toll-Free Message Center, a Generous Cash Bonus and the Top Sample Program in the Business. All orders acknowledged. Shipping Notices provided and **MUCH MORE!** No Investment, No Collections. Full or Part-Time. You're your own Boss. Contact Kevin Peska, **NEWTON MFG. CO.**, Dept. HIOC12, Newton, Iowa 50208.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

WANTED TO BUY

WILL pay \$25.00 for Joyce Porters' "The Unkindest Cut" in hard or paperback. Good condition. 2805 Menlo, Wichita, KS 67211.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ CUTLERY: A CUT ABOVE THE REST

The secret behind Regent Scheffield's new Laser 2000's cutlery is the unique machined edge guaranteed to stay super sharp for 25 years — without sharpening! The result is a knife so sharp and durable that it comes with an unmatched guarantee: If a Laser 2000 knife ever dulls, chips, rusts, or breaks during the next 25 years, Regent Sheffield will replace it FREE! Plus, the Laser 2000's blades have a unique nonstick Xylan coating, so slicing even hard vegetables is a snap. And clean-up is a cinch because food doesn't stick to the blades. Unbreakable, dishwasher-safe handles are contoured to fit your hand comfortably. A lovely sleek wood block holds the entire 5 piece set: bread knife, carving knife, cook's knife, utility knife, and paring knife. **\$129.98** (\$7.00) #A1933.



▼ THE MAGICAL SPARE BED

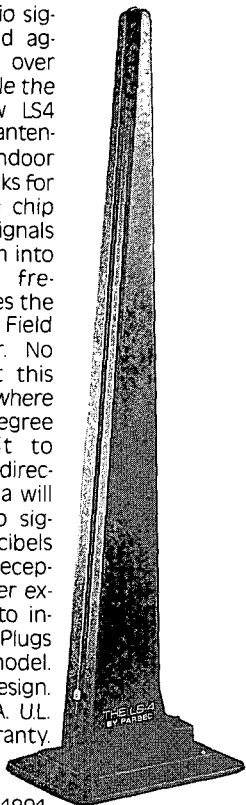
It's almost like pulling an extra bed out of a hat. Unlike most spare beds that gobble up storage space and are unwieldy to move, this one rolls down to fit a 36"-long, 3"-diameter canvas case, to stash in a closet corner, car trunk, camper, anywhere. Yet it unrolls in minutes to a full-size 27" x 73" bed that will even accommodate 6-footers, supports up to 500 pounds and is comfortable to boot. The secret's in the inventive construction: a cotton canvas sling is supported on laminated steel legs with 6 steel springs for cushioning and stability on rough ground. Toss the carrying strap over your shoulder and go — camping, beach, poolside; the 10" legs keep it off damp ground and sand. Of course, this bed is indispensable at home, country home, dorm — even for kids in motel rooms. A superb value at **\$61.98** (\$12.25) #A1931.



▼ THE BEST RECEPTION EVER!!

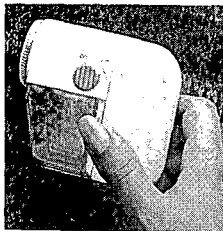
Eliminate radio signal fade and aggravating cross over signals that garble the sound. The new LS4 omni-directional antenna is the only indoor antenna that thinks for itself. The micro chip brain receives signals and isolates them into individual clear frequencies. Features the Gallium Arsenide Field Effect Transistor. No need to redirect this antenna. Leave it where it is and its 360 degree radius allows it to receive from any direction. This antenna will boost your radio signals up to 24 decibels for the clearest reception you have ever experienced. Easy to install, light weight. Plugs into any stereo model. Unique modern design. Made in the USA. UL listed. 1 year warranty. Dimensions: 3" x 4.125" x 17.25".

\$58.98 (\$5.25) #A1891.



▼ LIFT THE LINT

Removes lint, fuzz & pills from clothing, fabrics, furniture. This powerful, delicate, fabric shaver restores used sweaters, skirts, etc. FABRIC SHAVER works wonders, on one "C" cell battery (not included). Convenient removable storage bin for easy cleaning. **\$9.98** (\$2.00) #A1794.



▼ A PORTABLE GYM TOO GOOD TO BELIEVE



This portable lifeline gym is a 2 pound gym that can tone and shape all the muscle groups in your body in 1/4th the time required by barbells. The secret is dynamic variable resistance supplied by its indestructible design that instantly adjusts from three pds to 350 pds of resistance. Illustrated exercise booklet tells you how to move from one exercise to another. It comes with a 27" lifting bar, breaks down in the middle with stainless steel locking pins, jogging belt, 6 1/2 cable, door attachment and foot stirrups, neatly packed in its own carrying case. In addition, it converts to become a unique treadmill, pulley system and variable resistance machine. **\$48.98** (\$5.00) #A1937.

HOW TO ORDER

CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY,
7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

**30 Day Money Back Guarantee For
Exchange or Refund**

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 139 HK P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in (). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp. date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or C.O.D. orders.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1989

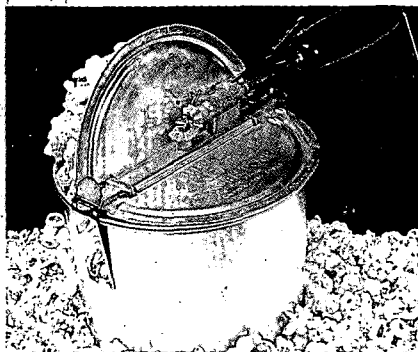
1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ☆ ORDER ☆ MALL

▽ GOURMET POPCORN



Most electric and hot-air poppers "puff" the corn more than they "pop" it, leaving it tough with hard centers. This flat-bottomed stove-top popper reaches 475° and pops full in two minutes with 4 quarts of the best popcorn you ever tasted. Stirring paddle with through-the-handle crank virtually eliminates burnt or unpopped kernels. Wooden handle for safe grip, two dump lids. Pop without oil for delicious diet popcorn. 370 calories per 4 qt. bowl. Produce tender, fluffy, old fashioned movie theater popcorn, **\$21.98** (\$4.50) #A1876.

HOW TO ORDER

**CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY,
7 DAYS A WEEK**

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

**30 Day Money Back Guarantee For
Exchange or Refund**

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 139 HK PO. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in (). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp. date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or, C.O.D. orders.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1989

1905 Swarthmore Ave, Lakewood, N.J. 08701

▽ INNOVATIVE IONIZER

Asophisticated electronic device that uses nature's way of cleaning air — emitting trillions of negatively charged ions that act like magnets, attracting microscopic particles of dust, smoke and pollen. One belongs in every room, but sometimes a table-top ionizer just isn't practical or desirable for reasons of space or your decor. This tiny unit (1½" x 3") provides an ingenious solution, plugging right into any wall outlet, where it will remain inconspicuous while performing its mighty task. With "on" indicator light and collector pad that can be rinsed and, eventually, replaced. By Pollenex, for fresher air in home or office.

\$39.98 (\$4.00)

#A1867.



▽ POCKET WORKSHOP

Hold an entire workshop in the palm of your hand or stash in pocket. Weighing in at 5 ounces and folding to just 4½" long, it opens to a full-size set of pliers (needle nose at tip, regular bolt grabbers in the middle and sharp wire cutter at the base). Plus 2½" knife; 4 screwdrivers, (jeweler's, medium, large and Phillips); awl/punch; file, can opener; fish scaler and ruler. Stainless steel, **\$25.98** (\$3.00) #A1712.

